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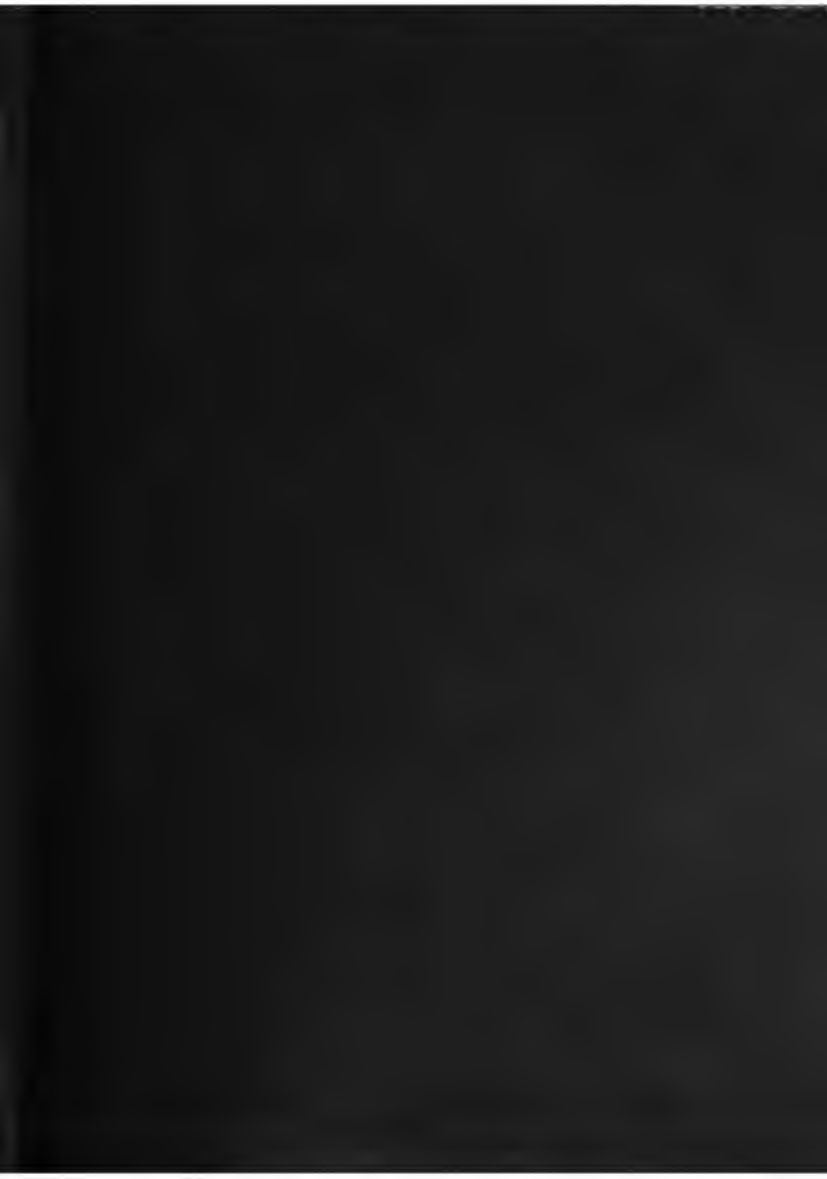
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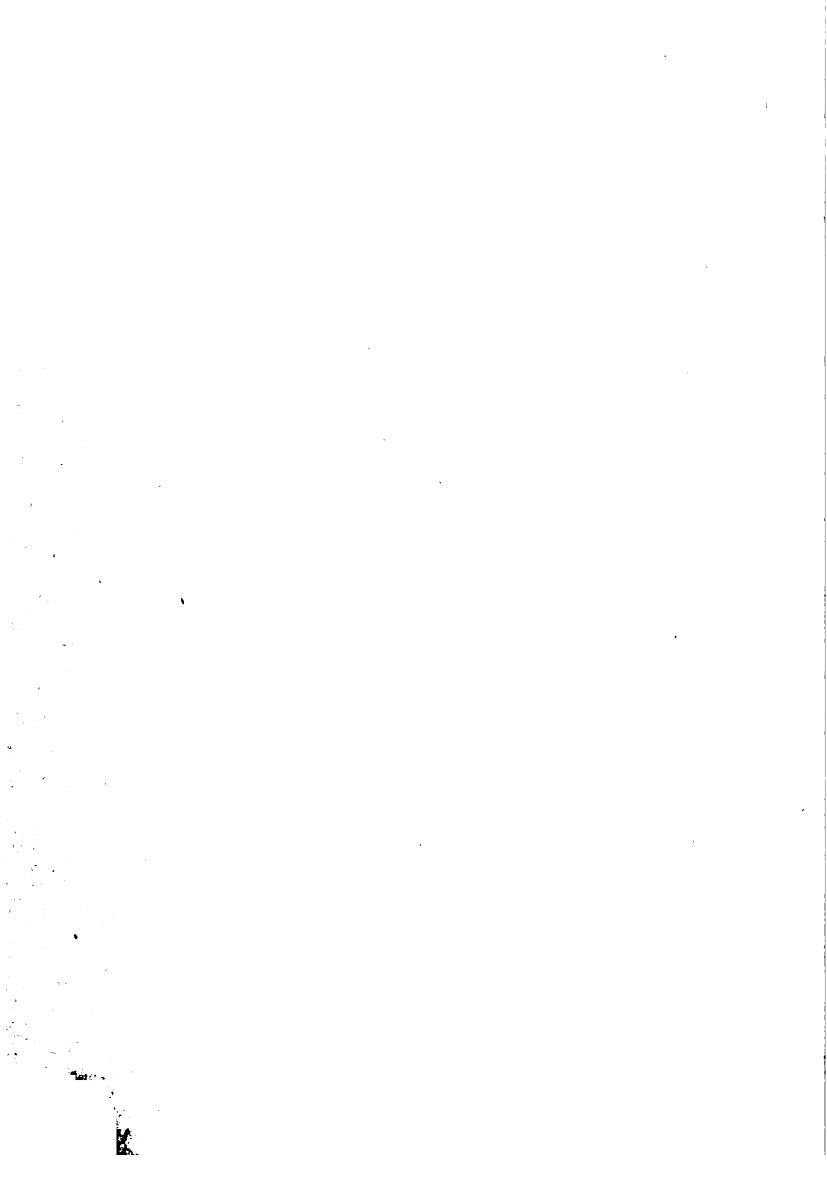


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THE
King's Treasure House

A ROMANCE OF ANCIENT EGYPT

BY
WILHELM WALLOTH

MOTTO: AND THE EGYPTIANS MADE THE
CHILDREN OF ISRAEL TO SERVE WITH RIGOUR.

Exodus. 1st chapter, 13th verse.

FROM THE GERMAN BY MARY J. SAFFORD

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Prof. Kenneth B. Murdock

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PREFACE.

The King's Treasure House, a dramatic romance, was the title I had at first intended to give this book, but I was deterred from doing so by the fear that the name might be mistakenly interpreted to mean that I desired to bring into existence a new variety of novel. The historical romance, so far as it is genuine, will always border upon the dramatic, always seek to be natural—two qualities which certainly elevate it above the reflective modern novel. The romance of ancient times, so far as intuitive evidence, typicalness, and delineation of character are concerned, always resembles the ancient epic poem. The author will strive, by avoiding all words that express mere abstract ideas, to infuse into its very language a tinge of poesy. The modern novel is rather the product of cold experience, sober observation, and that knowledge of mankind a diplomat or man of the world can acquire more easily than a poet. Exaggeration! many will exclaim in reading a romance of ancient times. But what is art save exag-

generation, making salient features still more prominent? Grillparzer says of the extravagant French dramas: "This, too, is nature! It is like a landscape seen through red glass." So let me be forgiven if, in this novel, the bright-hued, fairy-like scenes accumulate, the dramatic element is too conspicuous, the characters are simply drawn. Who knows! Perhaps it is more poetical to allow personages to develop according to simple but fixed rules and appear in plastic simplicity than, after the modern fashion, to create, by the collection of detached, often wholly unessential traits, characters whose carefully-constructed spines are in danger of lapsing into their separate verbetae as soon as they take an energetic stride. Simplicity is often richer, complicated effects are more simple than appears to the eye.

THE AUTHOR.

THE KING'S TREASURE HOUSE.

CHAPTER I.

THE FALL OF THE STATUE.

THE desert ! Empty and desolate as death, it gleams white in the west like a winding-sheet ; its yellow grains of sand lie thirsting under the scorching sun-glare beneath the sky until, where the beautiful azure hue changes into a tawny mist, it meets the poor, deserted, lion-haunted wilderness. Farther west still the Oasis of Amon, green, fertile, luxuriant, glistens like a lost emerald. But in the east the Nile flashes amid fields of golden grain. What a contrast ! Here death, yonder life. Here sorrow, yonder joy ; for scarcely the width of a hair divides sand and grass, the garden of Egypt joins the desert ; the land prospers only so far as the inundations of the Nile extend. And what a country it is ! The naked laborers on the pyramid, when from sheer exhaustion they drop their tools, often gain fresh vigor at the sight of the strip of land whose meadows, grain-fields, canals, harbors, temples, and statues of the gods hewn from reddish stone, lie outspread before them, nestling close to the waves of the river like the

gold-broidered mantle of a king. They are Jewish laborers, despised Hebrews, who, fanned by the burning wind from the desert, are toiling under the lash of Egyptian overseers to build King Rameses' tomb. The edifice is nearly completed; step towers upon step; the stairs rise in a dizzy ascent to the topmost summit where the monarch's colossal statue is to be placed. The men are now engaged in this difficult task. A steep incline leads over the crowded steps and upon this incline stands the stone statue of the sovereign; with arms closely pressed to its body and hands resting on its knees, it stares with calm solemnity at the countless laborers who are striving, by means of ropes and rollers, to drag the granite monster upward. On the knees of the statue stands the chief overseer, beating with his hands the rhythm by which the men are to pull; an assistant in front of him marks the time by striking two staves against each other. On both sides are water-carriers who wet the steep way to make it smooth and cool. Thus the king's statue moves slowly towards its destined place. The sovereign himself, standing in his war-chariot, watches the work from below. On the eve of starting to give battle to the warlike Cheta nation he desires, before quitting Egypt, to see his statue raised to the summit of his tomb. The monarch looks grave and his attendants share his mood, for the work at which they are gazing is as important as the task they are on the point of undertaking—both will cost human lives.

“Halt!” Rameses commands. “Let the laborers

rest a few minutes, give them water, and bid the women bring them food."

The order is obeyed. The colossus stops midway, the ropes are fastened, and the statue lies as it were at anchor. The overseer's scourge also rests and all eyes are fixed upon the king, who silently scans his own image as, menacing destruction, it hovers between earth and sky. Menacing destruction — for the slightest mistake, a single false pull, one error in beating time, may hurl the stone mass downward, bringing death to thousands. What an omen of evil it would be, too, should the king's statue sink from its place! All the spectators, even the toiling Hebrews, are aware of the importance of the moment; they rarely speak, signs and gestures supply the place of words. The silence of expectation prevails everywhere except on one of the upper steps, where an eager discussion is going on. An old white-haired Jew lies dripping with perspiration on the glowing stones of the staircase, while beside him kneels a dark-skinned young man, whose timid eyes sometimes dart a fierce look from beneath their lashes.

"Rise, Father," he whispers, "the overseer is noticing your exhaustion. You know that none of us, not even the old, are permitted to feel weary."

"My son Isaac . . ." the old man's parched lips can say no more. The son hands him a jug of water to moisten his withered lips, and the exhausted man's eyes sparkle gratefully as he smiles and strokes Isaac's hand.

"Get up, Father," the son again whispers, "do you

want to feel the vile Egyptian's lash? Don't force a son to see his father's back bleed? Oh, my heart boils with fury when you are abused."

"Let me lie here, don't trouble yourself about me, my son," replied the exhausted man. "Shut your wrath behind your lips, your anger cannot benefit me, you will only increase our misery. They will soon scourge me to death, but it is your duty to spare yourself. What will become of your sister Rebecca without you? Do whatever our taskmasters command — give me your hand upon the promise that you will patiently bear their insults, will offer no resistance until the Lord your God perhaps takes pity upon you."

The youth reluctantly clasped his father's hand. His features wore a defiant expression, but when the old man looked beseechingly at him he tried to smile.

"It is now forty years since I have dragged stones for the Egyptians' buildings," murmured the aged Jew. "When will Jehovah end the sufferings of His children and stop this torture? Oh, wretched Hebrew nation! Your women bear slaves, your men are reared to bow the neck. Your blood serves your haughty oppressors for mortar, your strength builds their immortal monuments, leprosy and dulness of brain humiliate you, your race hath become a pack of hounds. How illustrious we were when Abraham entered this country and the herds of Joseph's father grazed in the land of Goshen! God of our Fathers, hast Thou no more heroes to deliver Thy chosen people?"

Just as the old man reached this point in his solilo-

quy, the signal was given to resume the work of dragging the colossus. The overseers shouted and cracked their whips—the men rose from the steps to grasp the ropes. Set, one of the taskmasters, a nude, fierce-looking Egyptian, noticed that the old Jew feebly dropped the rope he was to pull and the son hastily raised it to add his weary father's burden to his own. Set sprang forward, savagely seized the old man by the throat, and shouted to him to pull at once himself.

“Have mercy, my lord,” moaned the helpless slave, “you expect old bones to do what young ones can scarcely accomplish. I can pull no longer, the rope slips from my feeble hands.”

“We'll see about that,” sneered the Egyptian, dragging the man, who had fallen on the steps, to his feet. “You'll pull, you old mummy, as long as the breath stays in your miserable leprous body. Take hold of the rope.”

The old Jew repeatedly tried to grasp the rope, but in vain—it slipped from his fingers. The overseer, gnashing his teeth, swung his whip, for the colossus, under the strain of a thousand arms, was already beginning to move. But, ere the thong hissed down, Isaac sprang between his father and the Egyptian, receiving on his own back the blow intended for the prostrate man.

“Do you resist, you rascally Jew?” shouted Set furiously to the pale, trembling youth. He had already seized the young Hebrew to enjoy the cruel pleasure of wreaking his vengeance on him, when a loud shout

from the king's war-chariot made his arm fall. Isaac also turned. There was reason for the cry — the statue, to the terror of all, stood awry. It had been unevenly pulled and the mistake must now be cautiously remedied. The chief overseer, on the knees of the stone image, shouted and gesticulated, the king and his courtiers were terribly excited. The overseers blamed the laborers for the error, the laborers the overseers. A general quarrel began, whips cracked in all directions so that for several minutes the work was entirely interrupted. At last the king commanded quiet and gave orders that the men should try to drag the statue back into the right position. Half the workmen, under the direction of their officers, now began, with the utmost caution, to turn the colossus. It was almost imperceptibly moving in the right direction and every one watched the dangerous experiment in breathless suspense. Suddenly there was a jerk and the statue stopped. The chief overseer thought that a splinter had been torn from the floor of the inclined plane by the revolution of the immense mass, and the work was again suspended. A sharp reproof, to the effect that Rameses was extremely indignant at the faulty execution of the plan, was brought to the officer on the statue's knees. The poor man's brain whirled, drops of perspiration bedewed his limbs, he strove to find a final expedient and, with the courage of despair, ordered all the workmen to pull simultaneously with their whole might to move the colossus from its place; even if the floor of the wooden way should be injured, the point

now was to get the statue over this one unlucky spot. The men began to pull, but the stone Rameses remained motionless. The overseers tried to increase the Hebrews' strength by plying the lash—their muscles swelled, low groans escaped from thousands of breasts, the ropes strained to the point of breaking, curses and prayers resounded in a strange medley—There—did the statue stir? Yes, it was indeed moving, that is, it was trembling from top to bottom; directly after a dull crash was heard, the floor of the inclined plane had broken.

“On, on, quick!” shouted the man on the knees of the colossus. But, when the hollow sound echoed on the air the Jews, terror-stricken, had slackened the ropes. They now perceived the peril of this proceeding, for the huge mass began to move slowly backward. Bewildered, every hand now pulled violently to stay the threatening downward motion, and in the confusion the dragging was so uneven that the stone mass rocked to and fro and the wooden way creaked and trembled. The Hebrews' courage now wholly deserted them, a deafening roar and medley of cries made every command of the chief overseer unintelligible. Some stopped pulling, others continued to do so, the chief official struck his forehead in despair—then came an appalling crash, a simultaneous shriek from thousands of throats, and the wooden slope gave way under the stone colossus. The roar of the fall was heard as far as Memphis; people out walking stopped to ask their neighbors what it meant; the litter-bearers gasped for

breath; the fisherman on the shore of the Nile dropped his hook; the man playing draughts paused in his game as the rumbling sound entered his room; it seemed as if the dead in their subterranean dwellings must start from the slumber of a thousand years, the ancient Nile, shaken by the trembling earth, dashed its waves aloft. Those who had escaped with their lives stood helplessly by as if turned into pillars, gazing at the place of destruction. For a few moments the whole scene was covered by a dense whirling cloud of dust; not until this had fallen could the extent of the catastrophe be measured. The ropes, jerked downward with mad speed, had swept hundreds of human beings from the steps; the rollers and pulleys fastened by chains had crushed all that came in their way as they fell; the slanting bridge shattered every living creature upon or beneath it; the whole pyramid resembled a pile of ruins, mutilated bodies, and blood. Cries for help, death-rattles, orders rent the air. Those who were uninjured tried to drag the wounded from beneath the ruins, but rarely succeeded. The king instantly sent a messenger to Memphis to procure physicians and litters, for though the destruction had fallen principally upon the despised Hebrews, Rameses, as a witness of the incident, at this moment felt compassion for his laborers who, struck down by his own statue, writhed bleeding in the dust or on the steps.

* * * * *

After the thunder of the falling statue had died away, Isaac instantly missed his father from his side.

Resolutely shaking off the horror which made his limbs tremble he sprang down the steps of the pyramid, and calling his father's name, searched despairingly amid the piles of sand and heaps of corpses that towered at the foot of the building. At last, after a long search, a faint voice which seemed to come from under a mass of broken rollers answered his agonized shouts. Exerting all his strength, he succeeded in working his way through the fragments of the destroyed machinery, for he perceived with terror that his father's body was hanging among the spokes of the broken wheels. More quickly than he himself would have deemed possible he reached the unfortunate man, raised him gently from the confused mass of fragments, and bore him carefully into the air. Here an examination of the motionless form convinced him that, though his father's head was bleeding from the blow of a beam, a feeble spark of life still remained in the wounded body. Bearing the old man on his shoulders Isaac stole cautiously through the ruins and unobserved reached the road to Memphis. The overseers were too busy to trouble themselves about individuals, and this circumstance enabled the young Hebrew to move on without challenge or delay. Casting anxious glances behind to see if he was pursued he fled from the spot as fast as his burden permitted, resolved to defend himself to the death if he should be forced to stop. It was a sacred duty to him to convey his father to a place of safety. But, as no one thought of pursuit, he slackened his pace in order not to hurt the wounded man, whose low moans pierced

his filial heart. He had gone half the way, when he met a caravan journeying from the Oasis of Amon to Memphis. The leader, a sturdy Egyptian, seemed to pity the hapless old man.

"Where are you going?" he shouted to the pair from his camel.

Isaac briefly replied that he was carrying a dying father, but the road to Memphis seemed to grow longer and longer, and he could scarcely stand. The leader stopped the caravan.

"It is not very far. Come nearer, my friend," he called. "You can lift your father on one of the pack-camels. We will refuse no dying man a last resting-place."

Isaac dragged himself forward, but the leader had scarcely seen the approaching figures distinctly ere he shouted an order to go on.

"Stay where you are," he called back, "you are Jews. Your father may die where he chooses, he'll find no place to do so with us." And the caravan trotted onward.

Tears of rage and shame trickled down Isaac's cheeks.

"Poor nation, poor father," he whispered. "Oh! when will the hour of vengeance come, when shall we be treated like men?"

He dragged himself wearily a few hundred paces farther, already the reddish-yellow temple-roofs of Memphis gleamed before him, but he stopped at the edge of a palm-bordered well to allow himself, as well as the old

man, necessary refreshment. After carefully placing his father's head on some moss in the shade, he now sought fresh water for the old Jew's quivering lips and saw a clay-vessel on the stone rim of the cistern. He was about to cool his father's brow with the contents, when an Egyptian maid-servant ran out of the little grove of palm-trees that surrounded the well on the eastern side, and screaming: "A Jew! Let my jar alone, you leprous wretch," snatched it from the youth's hands.

"Have pity on a dying man!" the young Hebrew tried to plead, but the woman never stopped scolding. Amid constant abuse she examined every part of the water-vessel and washed the place where Isaac's hands had touched it. His heart rebelled.

"Don't grudge me a drop of water, you pitiless woman. My father is at the point of death, it might save him. We are not beasts. We, too, have a right to live."

"It would be the best thing to let all you foreigners who have robbed us of the most fruitful soil die of thirst," she scolded on. "Our king, now in Osiris, spoiled you; but we'll show you that you have no right to sully the Nile with your filth."

"Why do you treat helpless men who have done you no wrong so contemptuously?" replied the poor fellow in a trembling voice. "Give me some water."

"Take it!" jeered the woman and spit at the pleader's feet.

Isaac could control himself no longer. A bound, a blow, and the clay-jar lay shattered on the sandy ground.

The Egyptian ran screaming away. At this season of the year the well was almost dry, and the Hebrew therefore tried to drop the water still remaining in the fragments of the broken jar upon his father's lips. He had scarcely succeeded in making the fainting man feebly open his eyes—to instantly close them again with a low moan—when the beat of horses' hoofs advancing filled his heart with the dread that pursuers were on his track. He started up. Yes, a party was approaching the well, several litters were moving rapidly in front. Isaac was already thinking of hurrying swiftly away with his burden; but on looking more closely it seemed to him that the new-comers were not thinking of pursuit, and he quietly determined to await the course of the affair. He soon discovered that his fears had been idle; the men were coming peacefully to the well; the litters contained some of the Egyptian overseers wounded by the fall of the colossus, whom they had received orders to carry to Memphis. The leader of the party turned to Isaac.

“Many more of the wounded are waiting for our assistance,” he began, “we must not stay; many brave fellows are yet concealed under the pile of ruins waiting in despair to be rescued. We will confide these three to your protection until we return. Watch the unfortunate men, they are overseers, all three at the point of death.”

The litters were placed in the shade of the palm-trees. Isaac, accustomed to obedience, nodded silently, the Egyptians, going back to the pyramid, soon

vanished in a whirling cloud of yellow sand. The Hebrew's eyes wandered carelessly over the three litters — the men struggling with death yonder were Egyptian overseers, his tormentors, his foes — was he to pity them? They were powerless now, could swing no more scourges, give no more orders. All three, with blood-stained garments, expressionless faces turned upwards towards the leaves, and lustreless eyes, lay motionless as corpses beneath the green canopy of the palms. Sometimes a quiver of pain stirred the features. Isaac saw a large fly, whose sting was extremely painful, settle on the forehead of one of the overseers to suck the blood which was flowing from under the bandage placed over his wound; the helpless man tried to drive the insect away; its sting was apparently causing him infinite torture. But the Jew watched the sufferer's efforts without sympathy. The bandage had fallen from another's arm, his trickling blood crimsoned the grass, but the Hebrew pretended not to notice it. The third wounded man now worked his way from beneath a heap of bandages and cushions, opened his reddened eyes, and stammered faintly:

“Water!”

Isaac glanced indifferently at him, then his rigid features suddenly changed, his eyes sparkled with fiendish joy, and he laughed jeeringly at the panting Egyptian.

“Water,” the latter again faltered.

Isaac started up.

“Is it you,” he cried. “You, Set, who struck my

father! God gave you into my hands. Oh, how good God is! Look, miserable Egyptian, there lies the man you struck — do you know us?"

"Give me some water, Isaac," murmured Set, "I will reward you. My head burns, my bowels are on fire, have pity."

"Pity? Did you have pity on me or my father?"

"Give me some water — I order you."

"Order as long as you choose and see who will obey."

Isaac turned away. Several minutes passed in silence, at last the overseer again extended his arms.

"Forgive me, Isaac," he moaned. "I have been a harsh master, it is true, but I will do better, I promise you. I am delivered helpless into your hands, will you abuse your power? Consider that you will be called to account if you injure me."

"What do I care," muttered the Hebrew, "if I can only glut my thirst for vengeance this one moment, they can do what they like with me afterwards. I'll give you no water. Suffer torment, as we suffered."

The Egyptian sank back groaning. Isaac was in the act of again lifting his father on his back, when the sight of the fainting Set seemed to move him to compassion. He went to the well, collected with difficulty the last water remaining in the broken jug, and held it to the Egyptian's burning lips. The overseer raised himself.

"By the Great Osiris," he said, "I will repay you, if I recover. You treat me nobly, Jew."

Just as he was pressing his parched lips to the moist fragment the Hebrew laughed hoarsely and, instead of letting him drink, hurled it on the sand. Then leaving the dying man to his fate he turned, bearing his living burden on his back, towards Memphis, and soon reached the gate. There, before him, lay the vast city towering like a huge mountain of towers, roofs, and halls into the sky, which seemed to shrink away in dread lest this surging ocean of houses should press upward into its sunny mysteries and annoy the eternal gods. This was the city of the pyramids, the city of the Apis, with her gods and temples, her harbor, her stately streets. But the poor Jew stole timidly past the palaces to the narrow, dirty quarter of his despised race.

CHAPTER II.

A NOCTURNAL ADVENTURE.

THE Hebrews were permitted to drag out their miserable existence in the northern part of Memphis. Here, dwelling timidly together like mice in their holes, they shunned the light and served their God. A Jew who ventured into any other quarter was almost always exposed to abuse, so the poor bondmen never felt at ease except in their own narrow, dirty streets. True, business compelled many to go to other portions of the city, and then the relatives left at home were always anxious until the absent one was again within the pre-

cincts of his own district. Outside, in the Egyptian quarter, as soon as the coolness of evening permitted a dense, motley crowd swayed to and fro. When the sun was about to set and its last rays flooded the summits of the pyramids with crimson light, the streets of Memphis became full of busy life. High officials and wealthy women were borne in magnificently-painted litters, carried by shining black slaves, through the portals of their houses, perhaps to bathe in the Nile. Here the baker, shrieking his wares, offered his board covered with little cows or crocodiles made of pastry, yonder the daintiest pottery, the most transparent glassware awakened admiration; soldiers in clanking accoutrements strode up and down, priests rattled their instruments as they entered a temple or, surrounded by a crowd of wailing women, bore a glaringly-painted mummy to its eternal repose. The farmers' teams, laden with huge ears of corn, were returning homeward from the fields; little ruddy children tumbled about among the rustling gold of the grain, and slender naked youths, leaning lazily against the smooth bodies of their cattle, guided the broad-horned steers. Torches flashed in the more secluded nooks; their gloomy, uncanny light flushed the lithe limbs of some dancing-girl who, surrounded by harp-players and enraptured spectators, was kindling love in the hearts of the young men. A youth, who had barely reached his twentieth year, noticed one of these groups. Leaning dreamily against one of the corner-pillars of a palace, his gaze rested absently on the nude beauty whose feet were twinkling on a costly rug in the crimson

glare of the torches. The fairer hue of her complexion instantly marked her to him as a Jewess. The youth doubtless pleased her fancy better than any of her audience for she occasionally darted a fiery glance at him, but he paid no heed. As the melody of the harps rose louder, the movements of the reckless girl became more impetuous till her large ear-rings rattled in cadence with the dancing; suddenly, by a bold side leap, she approached the young Egyptian, intentionally brushing him with her beautiful arm. Startled by the burning touch, he gazed in astonishment at the smiling features and eyes overhung by glittering gold spangles.

"My name is Rebecca," she whispered, but he contemptuously turned his back. The girl broke through the circle of spectators and called: "Do you shun me because I am a Jewess? Oh, you Egyptians hate the Hebrews, but you love the women of their race when they are fair."

An indignant wave of the young man's hand told the laughing audience that he did not know the dancer.

"But I know you, believe me," she retorted, her beautiful white teeth flashing as she smiled. "Your name is Menes and you are the son of the rich Asso, widow of the dead Steward of the Household of our late sovereign Seti I., now departed to the gods. Your palace is on the Nile-canal at the southern end of the city, where the road leads to Lake Moeris. Won't you stay with us, Menes? I love you!"

Menes strode off without vouchsafing the Jewess another glance; the mocking laughter of the spectators

echoed behind him. But the disagreeable impression produced by the scene vanished from the young man's mind as soon as he entered the crowded quarter of the city. Other shadows, however, clouded his gentle spirit, whose tendency was dreamy enthusiasm. He was the son of an aristocratic lady whose husband had held a high office at Thebes in the court of the dead sovereign. Menes' mother, accustomed to display and royal splendor, set a high value on external rank and cherished the ambitious thought of opening the way to the highest offices for her only son. She wished to see him in his father's place, nearest to the heart of the king, and with this object in view had determined that, at the close of the course of study he was pursuing in Memphis under several priests, Menes should go to Thebes and there, as a minor court-official, enter the ranks of the royal attendants until he could at last attain his dead father's rank. There was no doubt that this office would finally fall to his lot, but Rameses II. liked to test his great men before they were invested with the highest dignities.

But the noble dame was by no means satisfied with her son's conduct. How often she was forced to reprove him for the tasteless simplicity of his dress, so ill-suited to a future courtier; how often she bewailed the lack of color in his kerchief, which she would fain have seen striped with brilliant hues, or urged him to wear the rings set with valuable gems she had given him. He angrily cast the costly baubles aside, preferring to go half-clad, not to attract feminine attention to his

faultless figure and pliant muscles, but because he did not like to have his movements restrained. True, the bronze tint of his body was far more becoming to him than any garment, but this he regarded as little as his mother; she wanted to see colors. Frequently, glancing askance at him reproachfully, she upbraided him for preferring to associate with musicians, artists, and sculptors — in her eyes mere rabble — rather than with educated men of high position and staid deportment. Even when a boy, it was her son's favorite occupation to give expression to his imagination in drawings. Walls and papyrus-rolls suffered from his pencil; the priests had often caught him hurriedly painting heads of Osiris, little hippopotami, mummies, etc., upon the sacred rolls given him to be studied. True, all his teachers were delighted with his handwriting, the hieroglyphic characters seemed to fairly live under his fingers, but they had a less favorable opinion of his religious zeal in regard to sacred things. The boy asked them too many questions. Priestly wisdom was often silenced by these keen, incisive queries, which pitilessly exposed the errors and impossibilities of religion. It was evident to all that Menes was destined to cover the royal temples with wall-paintings, but how could such a thing happen? The child's father had been a court official. How could the son choose any other calling! This constraint fostered a bitter resentment in the boy's heart, which rose to desperation in the youth's breast. With despair in his soul, our hero walked farther and farther on from street to street. Wherever he saw a beautifully-painted

wall or a graceful column he paused a long time before it, criticising one part and admiring another in his ardent zeal. He felt that he could not resist a sense of reverence in the presence of many a picture, yet was conscious of his ability to surpass anything he had ever seen.

The streets were already shrouded in darkness, the brilliant radiance of the moon was shimmering upon the palace-columns, lending their gigantic forms a mysterious majesty. The cool breeze, which began to blow from the Nile, told Menes that he was approaching the harbor of Memphis. Passing around the pylon-like projection of a large storehouse, he walked along a small, narrow street and stood before the shipping in the port. There lay the ancient Nile, patiently waiting its burden. The vessels at anchor were mainly Egyptian and Phœnician. The slaves were principally occupied in landing pottery, grain, and domestic animals, but oil or gold from the Ethiopian mines was also seen. The bustle of trade was drawing to a close, only here and there some rich merchant, after examining the seaworthiness of his ship or the value of his cargo, was walking with dignified bearing towards the interior of the city. Quiet soon fell upon the animated scene, tiny lights gleamed on the vessels, slender columns of smoke rose from the cabins where the captains' families were preparing supper. Sometimes the song of a foreign bird brought from central Africa echoed from the mast; or an antelope destined for the pleasure-grounds of some high official thrust its delicate head through the

gratings of the hatches, or the last boat from some larger ship came ashore, bringing its freight of bales of papyrus or fish strung on cords. All was still, save for the ancient Nile rolling its precious waves between the shores that washed their rich garb of flowers and grain in its sacred flood. Menes went close down to the river, dipped his hand into the hallowed stream, and cooled his burning brow with the water that is more valuable than gold. Before him towered the deck of a Phœnician merchantman on which several sailors were playing morra, among them a swarthy Ethiopian. At first the game was carried on silently, but gradually as the fingers flew faster a lively dispute arose. Menes, disgusted with the childish quarrelling of the men, was just turning away when one of them asked him to act as umpire. He positively refused, saying that he scarcely understood the game and knew nothing about the cause of the squabble. The sturdy Phœnician sprang down the ship's ladder, seized him by the arm, and loudly explained that he had correctly guessed the number of fingers his neighbor held up, but the latter now denied it and wanted to cheat him.

"I held up two fingers," the other protested, "but you said three!"

"No," shouted the first speaker, "you held up three. Wasn't it three, Sir? You saw?" And he cast a glance of sly intelligence at Menes.

"For aught I know, you held up a thousand fingers and toes to boot," replied Menes with an angry laugh, "I neither saw nor heard anything."

He wrenched himself from the Phœnician's hand and went away. But he had scarcely left the scene of the dispute, when he heard a soft voice by his side and starting glanced around. The darkness, which had already closed in, allowed him to dimly discern two white female figures, one of whom advanced dragging the other with her.

"Come nearer, Myrrah," cried the girl laughing, "don't be afraid, you needn't be so shy, little one. Offer the young gentleman your flowers, he'll surely buy a bouquet of you — because — well, because you are so pretty."

Menes saw the girl thus accosted, a slender Jewish maiden, timidly hold out a small bouquet.

The other pushed her forward, at the same time whispering almost inaudibly in his ear:

"She's young and inexperienced, Sir. Don't lose the opportunity, I'll help you."

Then, turning to her embarrassed companion, she laughed loudly:

"Why! Why!" she scolded peevishly, "fasten it to the ornaments on the gentleman's collar, then he'll surely take it. Well, now! Come nearer! Step close up to him."

And again she whispered in Menes' ear suggestions that enraged him.

"Silence, malicious betrayer of an innocent girl," he said sternly. "But I warn you, maiden, against following this person so obediently. Beware of her temptations."

"Why, by Apis and all the sacred crocodiles," cried the flower-girl's companion laughing, "do I recognize him now? Yes, it's he, it's our pious Menes. Just see the straitlaced youth! He has panoplied his virtue with twenty shields."

Springing to the youth's side, she snatched the bouquet from the hand of her timid friend and fastened it on Menes' robe. The latter started back in dismay, for it was Rebecca the dancer that stood before him. He angrily flung the flowers away, but as his indignant glance chanced to fall upon the other girl the wrathful words he was on the point of uttering faltered on his tongue. He saw Myrrah's pleading black eyes beseeching his forgiveness as she carefully picked up the maltreated blossoms and modestly turned to go. A feeling of compassion stole over him, and he seized the young girl's hand.

"I am not angry with you," he said gently, "you seem quiet and modest, my anger was against your friend."

"She is not my friend," Myrrah hastily replied.

"Not your friend?"

"No, oh! no."

"That assurance gladdens my heart, Jewess. But why do you associate with her?"

"We live in the same house," murmured the girl, lowering her large oval eyelids. "I don't seek her society, she forces herself upon me. I sell flowers to the rich because I am poor and despised, like all the Jews. I don't like Rebecca at all, she wants to lead me into

evil paths, because she says I can earn a great deal by them, as she does."

"But you don't yield to her temptations?"

"I would rather starve," replied Myrrah in a tone of abhorrence, a deep flush crimsoning her fair forehead. "Dancing in public is so degrading. But, my lord, it isn't seemly for you to talk with a Jewess. True, it is dark, so we are not seen, but there are such wicked people in the world. You will bring danger on us both! Will you let me go now?"

"I have no authority over you," Menes answered in an embarrassed tone.

"Then farewell."

"May I — for protection — go with you to your house?" the young Egyptian called after the retreating figure.

"It is better for me to be alone," came back from the darkness.

Myrrah fleetly vanished down the street, leaving Menes in a strange condition of gloomy reverie. The girl's softly murmured words still echoed in his soul, his eyes sought to discern the hurrying figure, and for some time he stood motionless in the same spot. A warm breath fanned his ear. "Why, the pious youth's virtue is beginning to lose color," giggled some one at his side. A hasty turn showed him Rebecca's sly face vanishing behind a wall.

"I hate that woman," he muttered, as he prepared to return home. "She's a bold, repulsive creature, and I always find her when I least expect her and where

she annoys me most. She is surely plotting some mischief against me, her laugh sounded treacherous."

While walking on he could not help thinking of Myrrah, as she lowered her eyes so modestly and asked "if she might go now." The words sounded wonderfully bewitching. How delightful it would be to become her master, have her for a charming toy. A smile hovered around his lips, but he instantly and sternly repressed it. He tried to call up other ideas, thought of his mother, of the stillness of the night, of the moon — vain! The image of the lovely girl haunted the inmost depths of his soul. How foolish for her to ask him if she might go now. But she is a Jewess, I must banish her from my thoughts, it is not well to hold any intercourse with Hebrews. Had any of my acquaintances seen me talking with the girl, I should have been scoffed at or reprimanded by my mother. Murmuring these words he moved on, casting searching glances around him. Darkness had now wholly closed in, the streets and squares were scarcely lighted by the pale glimmer of the moon, the crowds of people had almost all retired into the centre of the city. Menes, absorbed by his own thoughts which, owing to his temperament, assailed him with great impetuosity, had paid no heed to his way. In consequence of the vast extent of the city, many portions, especially the Jewish quarter, were wholly unfamiliar to him, and ere he was aware of it he became uncertain which street would lead him back to his mother's palace. He supposed that he was approaching the part of the Jewish suburb located on the

Nile. The houses were low, the streets were narrow and empty. It had often chanced that Egyptians who had been detained in this part of the city or had even walked through it at night, had never been seen again by any mortal eye; they had fallen a prey to the rapacious, revengeful Jews, and no trace of them — not even their corpses — had ever been found. The corners of the streets favored this shameful work, for the dilapidated houses were often so close together that a soldier's war-chariot would inevitably have been crushed in the narrow way, if he had attempted to force a passage. The walls, built of rough bricks (mixed with straw) exhaled the heat absorbed during the day from the burning sunbeams; the tiny blinking windows almost touched each other; the moon scarcely ventured to peer into these black pits consecrated to crime, dirt, and darkness. It seemed to our friend, in his uneasiness, as if the gable-roofs were about to close over his head like waves. He became more and more bewildered by the dreary windings of the narrow alleys; the moon gave him no light, and only the small lamp placed here and there by some woman close behind her window-curtain, occasionally cast a faint ray upon his lonely path.

“I feel as if I had wandered into a labyrinth and should never find the way out,” he murmured. He thought it perilous to enquire where he was at any of the houses and had not yet met any passer-by, for the hour was now late; he believed he should be compelled to spend the night in this place instead of in his bed. Sometimes he turned to the right, at others to the left,

now he went down the streets, then up again, at last his brain fairly whirled, this creeping through endless winding alleys produced a sensation of giddiness; his very thoughts began to move in circles; the houses with their windows danced before his eyes and, utterly exhausted, he was obliged to lean against a door-post while considering whether to wait there until dawn. Scarcely had his wearied brain recovered its tone and his bewilderment passed away, when a low whistle made his heart throb faster. Directly afterwards shuffling steps were heard in the next street. Could he have been watched? Was he pursued? Menes' excited imagination began to run riot; what would the next seconds bring? He listened intently to the approaching sounds, which seemed to be made by the cautious tread of several men. Then the steps paused and whispering began just around the corner of the house in the next street. The young noble could not yet see the speakers, but he heard their words.

"He's an Egyptian," said a voice beside him, "he belongs to a prominent family, don't meddle with him, we shall be hunted down if we do him any mischief."

"If he belongs to a prominent family," the listener heard another voice say, which he instantly recognized as that of the Phœnician sailor with whom he had quarrelled a few hours before, "if he belongs to a prominent family, leave him to me. Our ship sails for Ethiopia to-morrow; if we put him in the lowest part of the hold no god will ever know of his presence.

You Jews shall be well paid for it, and we shall get our profit, too, when we make him a slave in Ethiopia."

Menes softly rose from his stone seat to fly from the danger already menacing him, for defence by the unarmed man against such superior strength was impossible. He heard his foes disputing together in low tones — they were apparently discussing their mode of attack. For the first time in his life, Menes felt that man is the eternal enemy of man. The oppression weighing upon his heart gave place to profound indignation; he was almost ashamed of being compelled to retreat; he clenched his fist and would have forgiven even his mortal foe if, at that moment, he had placed a sword in his hand.

"If the rascals succeed in gagging me, I am lost," he said to himself; "they will carry out their plans. I must steal away in the shadow of the houses."

He had already taken the first step, when he heard a noise behind him and directly after felt a net thrown over his head, while eager efforts were made to wind it around his whole body. A skilful movement of the arm freed him from the trap.

"Come out of the darkness, you villains," he shouted to the black forms that now pressed forward around the corner of the street, "it will fare badly with you, I can tell you, if you deal with me as you have resolved. I am invited to dine to-morrow with Metro, the powerful nomarch of Memphis, whom Rameses left here in his stead. As soon as I am missed from the

banquet, my distinguished friend will send all his soldiers to deliver me from your shameful snares."

This hastily-devised ruse did not wholly fail in effect; the men whispered together and seemed irresolute. The deserted youth, trembling with rage and excitement, stood before them, probably feeling that his life would be in less jeopardy amid a pack of panthers than among these covetous wretches.

"Is it thy will, mighty Osiris," he murmured, "that my life-career should end ere it has fairly begun. Oh, great God of the Sun, when I rose refreshed this morning and gazed joyously into thy radiant face, thou didst smile graciously upon me and conceal from me the evil the god of night is now preparing. Woe is me! How treacherous are the divinities!"

He took a few steps forward, but was instantly surrounded by four assailants, who made escape impossible.

"Why are you visiting the Hebrew quarter?" hissed the sharp voice of a little dark-skinned, hook-nosed man, "what do you seek in these streets?"

"I have lost my way," replied Menes defiantly.

"Don't believe him, my friends," said the other laughing. "He's an Egyptian spy, he wants to watch us poor Hebrews to accuse us before the courts."

"He's after our wives and daughters, like all the rest of them," said his neighbor, "kill the betrayer."

"What has he to do in our quarter at this time of night?"

"He's one of our oppressors, whom God puts in our power."

"Prepare to depart to the realms of the blest," the beleaguered man heard the Phœnician whisper. "His collar is wrought with pearls, gold buckles adorn his sandals, and I see an emerald sparkling on his hand. If we throw him into the river, who'll know anything about it?"

The youth saw the sailor loose a gleaming dirk from his girdle. The companions of the bloodthirsty wretch exchanged significant glances.

"Give me the knife," gasped the little Jew, "I'll thrust it into his neck from behind."

The dagger was transferred to the Jew, who attempted to push himself like a cat between the wall of the house and Menes. The young man, perceiving the movement, pressed firmly against the closed door of the house in order to at least protect his back, and stood there trembling, prepared for anything and gazing fixedly into the greedy eyes of the advancing Hebrews. To remain in this situation, he saw, was to encounter certain death. He therefore formed the desperate resolution of attacking the Jew and then instantly taking flight. The Hebrew pressed nearer and nearer, Menes already felt his hot breath; it seemed as if he must force in the door against which he was leaning or, with one mighty leap, fly over the heads of his assailants. The Jew was just raising his knife when Menes, without exactly knowing what he was doing, dealt him a terrible blow on the mouth with his fist. The stricken man, groaning, fell with bleeding lips on the ground. His comrades stifled a cry of fury, and Menes saw that his

doom was sealed; for the sailor, swearing fiercely, stooped to pick up the knife and the others drew back to prepare for an impetuous rush. The youth, bracing his back firmly against the door of the house, was making ready to at least defend his life till his last breath, and had clenched his trembling hands to receive the attacking party with powerful blows, when it seemed as though the door from which he gained protection and support was gently yielding to the pressure of his back. If his antagonists delayed their assault, escape was still possible. Ay, it was no delusion — Menes in his surprise let his arm fall — the door creaked almost inaudibly on its hinges, a bolt slid gently back, a small white hand slipped through a crack scarcely three inches wide, seized our imperilled friend's clothes, and drew him between the posts and the opened door.

"Come in quick," he heard some one whisper and he unresistingly obeyed the hand, for every moment was precious. The door closed again as cautiously as it had opened; Menes no longer stood in the street, but in a dark entry. The opening, closing, and drawing in had been done so quickly and noiselessly, that the avaricious wretches outside could not discover in what direction their prey had escaped. Menes felt as if he were waked from a troubled dream when a girl's familiar voice whispered: "Follow me, you are safe and can return home as soon as morning dawns; until then I must shield you from pursuit in my own room."

"Myrrah?" murmured Menes breathlessly. "You — my deliverer? I am in your house? Ye gods,

what are ye doing with me?" he softly added; "ye make me miserable one moment, only to fill me with happiness the next."

"Hush," said the young girl in a warning tone as she glided on tiptoe into her room, lighted a tiny oil lamp at the brazier of coals, and asked the man she had saved to follow her. "Hush, the other inmates of the house must know nothing about the adventure. Come, let me bolt the door. Step softly, sit down here and calm yourself, you will be entirely undisturbed."

Her manner did not show the smallest trace of embarrassment as she pressed the trembling Menes, whose eyes were glowing with emotion, into a chair.

"Don't misunderstand my conduct," she continued with charming modesty. "Just as I was going to bed, I heard voices whispering under my window and, raising the curtain, I instantly saw your unfortunate situation and thanked Jehovah for having permitted me to aid you. Oh, our people are embittered, do not be angry with them if they sometimes bite the fetters that are wringing the blood from their veins; forgive us, we are not all so. Indeed we are not."

Her eyes filled with tears.

"Do I not perceive in you that all your race are not the same?" murmured the exhausted youth, holding out his hand to the girl, and giving her a look of ardent gratitude.

"You speak gently to me," she answered thoughtfully, "you don't despise me like the others?"

"Your question wrongs me, Myrrah, why should I despise you?"

"I knew it," she exclaimed, gazing at him with sparkling eyes, "that's why I saved your life."

"Would you not have saved an utter stranger?" he asked, to test her disposition.

"I don't know," replied Myrrah reflectively, "if, like the rest of the Egyptians he had despised, abused me — oh! why should I have saved his life?" she answered almost wildly. The next instant she continued in a more gentle tone:

"But you are good and kind, I would have guarded your existence even if you had not noticed me" — she hesitated, then a smile hovered around her lips as she continued: "your existence is precious to me, I wish it were a rare flower that I might keep and tend it under glass. But I don't know why I am saying all this." Vexed with herself she grew grave again, and directly after took the lamp, hurriedly casting its light on Menes' pallid features.

"Your glance is lofty and noble, you look like your own Ra," she went on dreamily, speaking rather to herself than to him. "I would trust you in all points, you cannot deceive. If you said to me: 'Stand before the jaws of the starving crocodiles,' I would do it; if you were angry with me, if you struck me or spit on me, I would be proud of ill-treatment from you. But *only* from you — your cruelty would be a joy to me — yet if any one else dared do the same thing, I would"

. . . . her eyes blazed with haughty wrath, and she involuntarily clenched her beautiful little hand.

"But you are bleeding," she cried, turning pale and clasping his fingers. Her eyes, which had just flashed so proudly, grew dim as the red drops stained her hand, and an exclamation of pain escaped her lips.

"It is nothing," whispered Menes with effort, for Myrrah's manner had lulled him into a delicious half slumber. "I struck my assailant on the mouth, his teeth tore my flesh."

"That was well done," she answered smiling up at him through her tears, "you are a brave man."

This joyousness was instantly transformed into the most anxious solicitude. Water and a towel were soon at hand, and kneeling she turned the youth's sleeve back to cleanse his arm from the blood which had flowed down to the elbow. In doing so the beautiful rounded muscles appeared, and a blush crimsoned her fair face; she now seemed to realize the situation for the first time. Hastily drawing the garment over the arm, she rose, hurried to the door, and said with averted face:

"Stay here, I'll spend the night on the mat in the entry."

"Your lips have just told me, Myrrah, that you would trust me under any circumstances," cried the young man — "yet it seems you do not?"

"True," she answered smiling, "I was very foolish."

Menes, weakened by the loss of blood, leaned wearily on the table.

"Poor fellow, are you suffering?" Myrrah asked anxiously.

He smiled faintly and the young girl confidently approached him, put the lamp on the table, took from a wooden box a small loaf of bread, and placed beside it a bowl of milk and some dates.

"This is my holiday banquet," she said, "take what poverty can offer, you must be hungry."

Though Menes, touched by the plainness of the fare and the girl's kindness, at first gratefully declined touching the food he was finally obliged to take some milk to avoid offending his needy hostess.

"It isn't hog's milk that causes leprosy," she murmured sadly when Menes tried to refuse. Upon this, of course, he drank it. The young man had scarcely set the bowl down and praised its contents, when steps echoed on the stairs leading from the upper story. Myrrah started up in terror.

"Somebody is coming down," she whispered, "I must hide you."

She cast a troubled glance around the room. It contained nothing that could conceal Menes except a couch covered with straw, a chest, a chair and a table. The steps came nearer, the peril was increasing.

"The whole house is occupied by Jews," wailed the girl, "if they should discover you — woe betide us both! We shall be lost."

The steps now paused, and some one knocked three times at the door.

"Put out the lamp," Menes whispered, "I'll crouch

behind the chest and you can stand in front or, better still, sit down on it."

He sprang hastily behind the wooden chest. Myrrah hesitated to put out the lamp; but as the knocking was again repeated nothing else could be done. Then she hurried to the door, opened it about the width of two fingers, and asked: "Who is there, disturbing my sleep?"

"It is I . . ."

"Who?"

"I! Isaac."

"You?" asked the girl, "and how is your sick father?"

"My sister Rebecca hasn't been home for four nights," answered Isaac, whose acquaintance we have already made. "She roves about while her father lies dying, wicked daughter."

"I met her to-day for the first time," replied Myrrah, "she has earned a great deal, even gold. A rich admirer of her dancing gave her three gold rings, she could support you both if she chose."

"She won't do it," complained Isaac, "I must let my poor father starve. As we can no longer work on the pyramids, we are deprived of the ration of food formerly given us. I came, kind Myrrah — your gentle heart — it's wrong to seek you at midnight."

"Let that pass," said the girl almost harshly. "You know I don't like you, Isaac, but I can't let your worthy father starve. Take the last milk I have left and this loaf."

She gave the food to Isaac, who was standing humbly before her.

"May Jehovah thank you," he stammered, "it would be the brightest moment of my life if I could ever help you out of trouble, my dear child."

Myrrah turned with loathing from his cringing manner, and merely asked: "Does your father still lie speechless?"

"You are very kind to enquire for him," said Isaac submissively, gazing at the loaf with greedy eyes, "the old man has said a few words, but he is very feeble, Rebecca's course is driving him into the grave."

Myrrah angrily shut the door, for she knew that Isaac had formerly favored Rebecca's mode of life and profited by it for his own avaricious purposes. When the lamp again lighted the little room and Menes had come out of his hiding-place the youth, deeply moved, pressed the young girl's hand.

"You have done a beautiful deed," he said.

"Oh, if only they were not so wicked," she murmured sadly with downcast eyes.

Then, as Menes wished to hear it, she told him the whole story of her life. Parents she had never known. She still dimly remembered, in her earliest childhood, playing among the pillars in the court-yard of a temple, where she was sometimes visited by a noble lady whose magnificent litter yet lingered distinctly in her memory. All the priests and priestesses respectfully made way for the beautiful, stately dame, bowed before her, and with profound reverence enquired for the king's health. The

lady always smiled, jested gaily with her attendants, and in taking leave of the chief priest invariably handed him a gold ring and asked what progress Myrrah had made, whereupon an elderly priest gave her the desired information. This priest showed the child the greatest kindness, she learned to love him like a father. One day the great lady was borne into the temple in a state of intense excitement. A long and stormy interview between her and the chief priest was followed by universal consternation among the college of priests; the lady sank weeping on the ground, the high-priest tore his garments. The temple-servants were hurriedly summoned to burn a heap of papyrus rolls which doubtless contained some secret; Myrrah was already rejoicing in the cheerful fire, when the arrival of thirty of the royal police stopped the work. They rummaged through the rolls, the words: "conspiracy, fraud, etc.," fell on Myrrah's ears; the high-priest and the lady, by the king's orders, were sentenced to imprisonment for life in the Ethiopian gold-mines. Here followed a gap in Myrrah's recollection, then she recalled wild, dark mountains, intersected by white veins, into whose rich stores of metal opened numerous shafts. Thousands of laborers were busied in washing the glittering yellow ore from the sand, which was first crushed in mortars. The sun scorched, the overseers' whips pitilessly urged on the work. Even she, a delicate child, was obliged to carry away the stones brought out of the shafts. Her hands bled, beside her, clad in a ragged dress, hollow-eyed, and ill, cowered the same noble lady who had

been borne into the temple, the fingers that had formerly toyed with pearls and fans now poured water over dirty pebbles. She often received from this lady a sorrowful glance or a fervent kiss, but rarely heard any words from the pale, withered lips—only sighs escaped them. One day the lady received a letter, which a royal official read aloud to her.

“Pardon!” she faltered, trembling with joy, pressed little Myrrah passionately to her breast, and sank to the ground.

The officer stooped over the prostrate form.

“Too late,” the child heard him say carelessly, “joy has killed her.”

From this time no living soul heeded Myrrah, who wearily begged her way back to Memphis, where she eagerly strove to find her foster-father, but in vain. Jews, seeking gain, took the little girl to train her for dancing or other arts; but the child's modest reserve baffled their plans. So she led a sad, tortured existence during the years that really ought to be consecrated to happiness, supported herself with difficulty by small pieces of handiwork, sold flowers, or even, when her timidity prevented her from appearing in the streets, starved. Menes, absorbed in gazing at the sweet face of the solitary, forsaken child, listened with tearful eyes as she told her story. When she had ended the tale, he fancied that she was still speaking and, bending his head dreamily towards her, appeared to be yet drinking in her words.

“The dawn is already brightening my window,”

Myrrah said after a long pause, "we have talked away the last hours of the night very swiftly. It is time for you to go, Menes."

Menes started from his reverie. A shiver shook his frame as he raised the curtain and saw the street lying before him steeped in the grey and crimson light.

"The cool morning breeze is blowing from the Nile," he said faintly. "You are right, Myrrah, I must go. They have doubtless waited anxiously for me at home, and I shall receive no pleasant greeting from my mother. But I don't care for that, I have experienced during the past night the brightest hours of my monotonous life — rescue from danger, the sweet conversation with you, the glimpse of your pure, artless soul."

Myrrah put out the light and opened the window, then seating herself silently on the wooden chest, appeared to wish to take no farther part in what was passing around her.

"Have you nothing to say to me at my departure?" Menes asked tenderly.

The young girl shook her head mournfully.

"Really? Not that I may be permitted to see you again?"

A long pause followed. Both were standing face to face, their hearts filled with blissful pain. Suddenly Myrrah went to a cupboard, took out a knife, laid it before Menes, and with averted face murmured

"Kill me."

The astonished youth, shuddering, drew back a

step, then rushed forward to embrace her, but seeing his purpose, she eluded him.

"How can you let such wicked words cross your lips?" he stammered reproachfully. "I kill you, I who adore you as if you were a goddess, who would fain protect you from every evil, from hunger, from insult, who envy even the tiniest fly that is permitted to run across your head! I kill you? And why do you desire death? Why do you give me the grief of seeing you suffer?"

"Consider who you are," replied the Jewess. "Will you . . ." she laughed bitterly — "will you tell your haughty mother that you have spoken to a Jewess and she fled from you? Will you bear the Jewess as a bride across the threshold of your home? Oh! believe me, you do not honor me, though you firmly intend to do so."

"Don't laugh so wildly, Myrrah," cried Menes trembling, "you hurt me! Know that I should honor you, even if I saw you in the fields tending the unclean swine or whirling in loathsome circles as a dancing-girl. Nothing can dishonor you in my eyes, nothing can drive me from you or dim your image and, if my haughty mother is angry, be it so, she is not necessary to my existence, but you are."

Myrrah had burst into loud sobs.

"Go! Leave me!" she sighed. "If you should trifle with me, you would kill me. I feel that you will bring me to destruction. It would be better if I had never seen you, or if I could die at once, for I know

not how I can exist without you, and I shall never be permitted to share your life."

The young man tried to soothe the weeping girl, lavished the tenderest names upon her, assured her that he would steal to her house every evening, that he would daily send a faithful servant to bring her food, but she vehemently repelled all his caresses, tried to hide her tearful face, and exclaimed again and again: "Go! Oh, would that I had not saved your life, would that they had slain us both!"

After many futile efforts to come to an understanding with her, Menes rose.

"You wish me to go. Very well then, I will obey you," he said with sorrowful pride. "Farewell, and forget me as I will try to forget you."

He had already reached the door, when Myrrah started up as if to detain him by throwing herself on his breast, but with a powerful effort she controlled her emotion and, with drooping head and arms hanging feebly by her side, sank back on her seat.

Menes went away.

At the end of a few minutes a seal-ring adorned with an emerald beetle flew through the little window and fell at Myrrah's feet. For more than half an hour the girl sat motionless. Her friend's steps had long since died away, the street was full of people going to pursue their trades; overseers were entering the houses to collect taxes or get Hebrew youths to burn brick. Carriages rolled by, litters were borne along, the roar of a great city entered the girl's little room. At last

she shook off the melancholy weight of depression, cautiously picked up the emerald ring, kissed it, wrapped it in a fine handkerchief and, blushing, hid it in her bosom. Then she put her kerchief on her head to go to the banks of the Nile and gather flowers to make some wreaths and bouquets ordered for that evening by a wealthy Egyptian to give luxury and beauty to his banquet. When, at the end of two or three hours, she wearily returned to her little chamber— who can describe her amazement— her table bore a delicious meal such as she had never beheld, far less tasted. Roast goose, delicate pastry, dates, wine stood before her astonished eyes.— yet she left the food untouched.

CHAPTER III.

A DEATH-BED SECRET.

THE room directly over Myrrah's was occupied by the sick old Jew. Its mud walls revealed several holes, through which the wind whistled at will. The floor was none of the cleanest, the tables and chairs were very dilapidated specimens, whose hue had long since faded into a repulsive grey. Through a torn green curtain the sun shone on some broken clay vessels that stood upon the floor. The old man was lying upon a very low wooden pallet, covered with a few rags; his breath came slowly through his lips and his chest heaved painfully. Beside him knelt his son Isaac, gazing anxiously into his father's pallid face and wander-

ing, lustreless eyes, and sometimes straightening the blood-stained bandage on his forehead or moistening his lips with water.

"Do not die, Father," gasped Isaac, "you know I love you, do not desert your son yet, endure this wretched world with him a little longer."

"Where is your sister Rebecca?" asked the dying man with an effort. "I haven't seen her since I lay suffering from this wound, why doesn't she come to her father's death-bed?"

"Forgive her, Father," said the young man, hastily clasping the old Jew's quivering hands. "Forgive your daughter and me! How could I suspect, when I induced her to relieve our want by harp-playing and dancing, that she would grow so heartless, so wicked?"

A shadow flitted over the old man's face.

"Yes, it was you," he gasped, "who played into the hands of the rich Setineht, that he might ruin my Rebecca to save us"

"To save *you*" — interrupted Isaac trembling.

"To save us from starvation," continued the aged Jew. "From that day she sank lower and lower, learned sinful dances, alluring songs, and what she earned no longer benefited us, she squandered it with soldiers or bought golden gauds to deck her person. My child was not wicked, she was only lively, fond of pleasure, naturally impulsive — are those sins? No! But sins grew out of them; the poison tasted sweet, she drank it eagerly from the Egyptian's hands, and now she is entirely corroded by it. Oh, Isaac, what a

wrong you have done me! What a creature you have made your sister!"

Isaac bent over his father and kissed his withered lips.

"Do not think of the misguided girl," he pleaded gently. "That she has become what she is shows that there was a germ of evil in her, she would have been the same without my aid. See! I nurse you, I sit day and night beside your bed, I starve, I beg for you — can you say I am a bad son? But she! What does she do! Laughs, dances, flirts, while her father"

"Do not speak of her," replied the exhausted man, "I am suffering, Isaac, give me some water."

Isaac did as he was requested and then crouched close by the sick man's head, listened to his irregular breathing, and meanwhile sometimes looked longingly at a bowl of milk he had begged for his father. Often he involuntarily stretched his trembling hands towards it, but always let them fall again as soon as his eyes rested on the wounded man's face. He was evidently enduring terrible hunger, several times his eyelids closed from weakness, yet filial duty commanded him to resist the powerful impulse of nature, for that day the little vessel of milk was the only nourishment for both. After a long silence Isaac noticed that the sick man's features suddenly altered strangely. He grasped his son's hand, and gazed at him with a solemn, mysterious expression in his eyes:

"Isaac!"

"Father."

"Raise me, I must talk with you."

"Yes, Father."

"Quick, for I feel the approach of death."

With Isaac's assistance he sat up groaning, told his son to see that no one was listening, and then to shut the door carefully, darken the window, and put his ear close to his lips. When this was accomplished he drew a long breath, had the milk given to him, and began:

"Ere my eyes close forever, my son, I must confide to you an important secret, of which, hitherto, I have been the sole possessor. Know, that when a young man under the reign of our last king, Seti I., I helped to finish one of the grandest works the earth ever saw or ever will see."

Here he paused exhausted to take breath. Isaac anxiously waited the next words from his father's lips.

After the old Jew had rested, he continued in a whisper: "I was among the band who were forced to build the monarch's treasure-house."

"What? You, Father? Yet you are still alive?"

"All who worked upon the building, even the architect, were put to death, that no one might betray where it was situated or by what paths the interior could be reached. They were killed, Isaac! All were killed!"

Agonies of pain forced him to pause and he seemed on the point of fainting; but Isaac supported him.

"And you escaped the Egyptians' murderous blades?" asked Isaac with a throbbing heart. "But rest a little while before you go on with your story."

"I escaped," the old man began again, summoning

all his strength. "I thought it made no difference whether I was slain by a soldier's sword or starved to death in the vaults I had helped to build, so after all the other laborers had been taken out of the building I hid myself in a chest. There I remained in darkness for three long days. At last I groped my way through the familiar corridors to the door, which had not yet been walled up. From thence I fled to the rushes of the Nile, where I remained concealed a still longer time to evade my pursuers. Those were terrible days, my son, I lived more like a wild beast than a human being. Not until after many years, when I was forgotten or supposed to be dead, did I venture to show my face again."

The old man had uttered these words in gasping accents, it was evident that he was anxiously striving to reach the end of his story in order to reveal the whole extent of the secret ere death could seal his lips.

Isaac tried to interrupt and beg him to spare himself, but the father motioned to him to keep silence, and in still more hurried, anxious tones continued :

"Listen to my words, child, for I wish by the secret I shall now impart, to make you happy, rich, and powerful. I had not the courage to carry out my intention, but you lack neither sagacity, resolution, nor inventive genius. You'll make up for what I, like a timid old fool, neglected."

Isaac's breath came more quickly in his excitement, and bending his ear close to his father's lips he drank in his whispering accents.

“I will describe,” the old man continued, “the way you must go to reach the interior of the treasure-house, where stand the golden vessels filled to the brim with gold rings and gems, and where you can take as much as Jehovah will permit, for it is no sin to rob the enemy. When I have closed my eyes, wealth and splendor will enter my son’s miserable hut; you will build yourself a palace on the shores of the Nile, like the mighty Pharaohs, rest on purple cushions, and be served by beautiful slaves. You will row your gilded boat over the waves of the ancient river, and be borne along in magnificently-painted litters. Isaac, you will rise from the dust of bondage, you will set your foot on the proud neck of the oppressor, you will avenge your own disgrace, your father’s ignominy and death — for whoever has wealth, has power. Corrupt and destroy our foes, and from my grave I will bless you; my spirit will protect you.”

The old man’s feeble voice had grown lower while Isaac, with glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes, listened to his story.

“Father,” urged the astonished son, “the king’s treasure mine? Mine? It is no monstrous delusion of your fevered brain? I, the despised, insulted Jew, rich, powerful, the avenger of my people? Father, my brain whirls, my senses fail; it seems as if I saw the royal treasure glittering before my eyes like a sea in the glow of sunset, the gems turn to flames that scorch me, the gold sends forth a poisonous yellow vapor that stifles me — I see myself walking in magnificent gar-

ments, laughing scornfully at my oppressors. — Father, do not drive me mad with terrible joy.”

By a strong effort he at last succeeded in controlling the panting of his laboring breast and, raising the dying man, he addressed a few tender words to him and, in a rapture of delight, gratefully kissed his forehead. The old man, in broken accents, now began to describe in what direction Isaac must turn to find the treasure-house.

“ You see I am making you a rich bequest, my dear son, richer than the wealthiest royal official can bequeath,” he faltered with still greater difficulty, “ now I shall die willingly, for I have made you happy.”

“ Father, you forgot to tell me exactly where the treasure-house is,” cried Isaac anxiously, “ collect your senses that I may follow the description precisely — if I have no idea where the treasure lies, how am I to find it? Is the building in the south-eastern part of the city, where the ancient royal residence of Memphis stands surrounded by other edifices?”

The old man drew with his finger on the floor the direction his son was to take. If he approached from the city, it was the third and largest of the buildings; vast pylons towered into the air before it, but the doors leading within were so concealed that no human being would suspect where they were; they opened from the rear of the palace upon the Nile and were located just at the surface of the river, so that during an inundation they were entirely under water. The excited Isaac was just on the point of asking how he could find this en-

trance and by what device the heavy stone was moved, when a merry laugh was heard outside the door. Isaac sprang forward, but had scarcely opened it when his sister Rebecca, singing gaily, danced into the room, but paused in the midst of the tune and stood still as she saw her emaciated father slowly raise himself.

"Not in my presence," the sick man, already under the shadow of death, gasped in a hollow tone. "Gone from your father's couch, you castaway, do not shed the influence of your base passions, your miserable love of pleasure, upon a head consecrated to the grave. Why do you come to disturb my last moments? Why do you bring this discord into my quiet room? Could you not have waited until these eyes no longer beheld you, these ears no longer heard your idle songs? Isaac, hide her from my sight, I will not die in her presence."

"Father, she is your child," pleaded the brother, pressing his father gently down upon the bed. "Forgive her, do not take your wrath, your resentment, into the grave."

"She has abandoned the God of our Fathers and shall not I abandon her?" cried the dying man, fixing an angry glance upon the girl. "She has abandoned our people, held intercourse with the stranger; have nothing to do with her, Isaac, let her starve, she will bring disgrace upon our heads. Just see how gaily she is bedecked, how she can laugh, sing, and . . ."

Weakness prevented further speech; the hand raised to curse her sank feebly on the couch, his head

fell back like a dead man's. Isaac bent despairingly over the almost breathless form, Rebecca stood as though dazed, holding the door in her hand. When her father stopped speaking she approached the prostrate figure, but Isaac waved her back. She stood with her eyes cast down in shame, till her gaze chanced to rest upon her gold bracelets. Hastily stripping them off, the next instant the gold ornaments on her dress fell to the floor under her fingers, and the tabor dropped from her arms. She felt with a shudder how strangely her frivolous finery appeared in the solemn moment when her father's soul was quitting the world. Her eyes grew wet, and she stole cautiously to the dying man to bedew his cold hands with her burning tears. She knelt long by her father's side, lavishing attentions upon him, but he only had strength to murmur: "too late." Whoever had seen her at that hour would have believed her the most anxious and loving of daughters, and even those who had watched her dancing in the streets would now have forgiven her, so completely was her whole nature transformed, so thoroughly did she seem to repent her mode of life.

The brother and sister exchanged whispers, intimating that their father's death was evidently approaching. It already seemed to the pair, who were watching every breath, as if the regular movement of the sufferer's chest was ceasing. Isaac was covering his eyes with his hands that he might not witness the death-agony of one so dear, when the latter again raised himself and by unmistakable signs asked for a pencil and a

roll of papyrus. When the son had handed them to him he saw his father, whose tongue already refused its service, convulsively trying to force his trembling fingers to write something on the roll. Guessing that it concerned the secret door of the treasure-house, he watched the wavering pencil with burning eyes, nay he almost forgot that he stood in the presence of death; the prospect of obtaining the treasure for the moment conquered his grief for his expiring parent.

But after some time he noticed with dismay that the marks made by the dying man's fingers were almost wholly illegible. He explained this to his father, asking what this or that sign was intended to mean. The old Hebrew looked beseechingly at him as if to say: "Make out my writing, my fingers no longer obey me." Then he let the pencil fall, laid his feeble hand wearily on Isaac's head, sank back, and after one convulsive quiver of his whole body ceased to breathe. Rebecca burst into violent, despairing sobs, while her brother gazed at the dead man's features in dull, tearless grief. The girl could not control her anguish, she tore her garments, beat her breast, flung herself on the floor, in short gave herself up to the most passionate lamentation.

Many hours elapsed ere Isaac could gain sufficient composure to conceal from profane eyes the papyrus-roll on which the dead man had scrawled confused characters. While his sister was bathing the face of the corpse with her tears, beseeching forgiveness, conjuring the lifeless form to perceive her remorse and speak one kind word, he cautiously drew out the roll

to decipher the writing. But scarcely had he buried himself a short time in his task to forget his grief, when he felt that he was succeeding almost too well; no thought save how to become the possessor of the mysterious treasure could find room in his brain. All day long, and until far into the night, he sat bending over the roll. He forgot sleep and food, did not hear his sister's expostulations, nor notice that his father's body was borne out of the room.

The sheet had inspired him with a positively fiendish thirst for gold. He did not perceive that the corpse had vanished from the chamber until Rebecca reproached him for his heartlessness. Then a passing emotion overpowered him, but the feeling soon disappeared when his eye wandered to the scroll so full of promise. At last, after pondering long and earnestly, he saw how impossible it would be for him to read the signs that fairly danced on the page; let him turn and twist the roll as he would, light it with the feeble lamp as he might, it made no disclosure. The prospect of being unable to read the writing and thus debarred from winning the treasure finally plunged him into such despair that tears streamed from his eyes and, after much helpless deliberation, he waked his sister whose fatigue and grief had merged into a feverish half slumber. As well as his excitement would permit, he told the astonished girl the secret. Rebecca, completely restored to her former cheerful vivacity by this communication, instantly seized the roll.

"You are clever," said her brother coaxingly, "*one*

woman has more penetration than *ten* men, you will certainly succeed where I failed. Make sense of this stupid scrawl, connect the broken words so that I may learn the exact place where I am to enter the building. I must know the precise spot; the danger of the whole enterprise will not permit me to search."

"Here at the commencement," said Rebecca, after glancing over the scroll, "are the following lines: 'the door is at the level of the surface of the Nile.'"

"I went as far as that, too," replied Isaac. "Father had already told me so verbally. Go on, read on."

"Stop," cried the girl, "hear whether I have guessed right, this sign, which looks like a drunken mummy, ought to mean: Seek . . ."

"Perhaps so, little sister. Find out what follows."

Rebecca pondered over the page, her lips moving speechlessly. After a short time, she whispered:

"Seek in the wall-painting . . ."

"Wall-painting! Could that be the meaning of yonder flourish, which looks like a hippopotamus splitting with laughter?" Isaac gaily interrupted, "I really envy your sharp eyes, you clever girl."

"They are hieroglyphics," replied Rebecca, "which you don't fully understand; from this place, Father used the Egyptian writing. So: Seek in the wall-paintings the likeness of the god Sebek, who sits on a throne and has a crocodile-head."

"We are coming to the end," exclaimed Isaac glee-

fully, "go on, dear sister, I should like to kiss you, girl. Why didn't I give you the roll sooner, we should know the place by this time."

"It is perfectly plain," Rebecca continued. "Where the god presses his hand upon his knee, exactly where he holds the lotus-blossom is — oh! listen, Brother — is the spot on which you must strike. The stone, if you press against it, will instantly turn on its hinges, revealing an opening through which you can easily reach the centre of the building."

"We have accomplished our aim," murmured Isaac, pressing his clenched hand upon his throbbing heart, "we are rich, we are powerful. Oh! Sister, this happiness is too great, I cannot yet believe its reality. Beware! It is only a beautiful dream, we shall soon wake to be as poor and wretched as before."

"Perhaps the royal treasure may have been removed long ago," said Rebecca, striving to maintain an air of indifference, "or this paper may delude us by owing its existence solely to the fevered visions of a dying man; but at any rate you must try to control your excitement, Isaac. We are still a long way from our mark; calmness, cool reflection must now show us the means to undertake this hazardous enterprise; we can only succeed in securing the treasure by going to work with clear brains. Impetuosity and craft are foes! The strategist must be hard and cold."

"But your cheeks, too, are flushed, your heart throbs faster, my dear sister," said Isaac, sinking into a chair and forcing himself to remain quiet. "Yet you

are right, excitement can do no good. The first point to decide is when we will risk the dangerous trip."

"Stop," cried the dancer suddenly, "here is one more remark on the paper which I overlooked; move the lamp nearer."

"Well? Can you decipher it?"

"It says," the girl began after a few moments, "that you must take a light, for the passages of the vault are of course perfectly dark, and you must not forget to shut the stone door behind you after your entrance."

"That's a matter of course," replied Isaac, smiling as though fairly intoxicated with joy, "oh, what a kind, careful father!"

The brother and sister now discussed what night and what hour should be chosen for the dangerous enterprise. When they had once been over the way, it would probably be easy to do so frequently; but the first entrance into the treasure-house required thorough deliberation and great caution—the whole plan might possibly be destroyed if guards were stationed about the buildings. They did not conceal from themselves the fact that they were risking their lives, but the idea of transforming their poverty by means of these royal riches into brilliant, measureless wealth seemed well worth staking even existence on the venture. At last they agreed, if Isaac could be spared from his work, that he should first of all look at the buildings by daylight in order to find the way more easily at night.

The young man secretly slipped away from the brickkiln at noon and succeeded in reaching the pylons

of the edifice, but returned to his sister with the discouraging news that the palaces were guarded by soldiers day and night. Rebecca did not lose courage, but said that on the day chosen for the enterprise she would so bewitch the soldiers by her dancing that they should forget why they were stationed before the gates. Isaac assented. Day by day, at his work, the overseers reproved him more and more harshly for absence of mind and slowness. He could not succeed in kneading and shaping the clay; sometimes when he received a blow from a whip an expression of defiance flitted over his features as though he wanted to say: "Just wait, you will soon tremble in my presence as I now do in yours, for robes of Assyrian purple will rustle around this naked form, these calloused feet will rest on gilded sandals, the lips that now drink foul water will soon press goblets of Ethiopian gold and sip costly wine." He listened to abusive words with a sarcastic smile, gazed carelessly at the haughty officials, sometimes took the liberty of making sharp speeches, and obeyed orders with a sullen laugh. Once, while resting from his toil, he drew out the roll to glance over his father's directions. This piece of carelessness might have had serious results; the chief overseer, who had been watching him, snatched the papyrus from his hand.

"What is the rascally Hebrew reading?" he cried. "Reading is poison to fellows like you; it makes you wise, and we can only use you when you are like the brutes. Do dogs read? A blow for every letter; bare your back."

Isaac turned pale; if the furious Egyptian's eye fell on the characters he was lost.

"What wretched writing it is," sneered the official, "let me read . . ."

"My lord," stammered the bewildered Jew at last, "they are — they are prayers."

"What?"

"Hebrew prayers, which would surely only bore or anger you. Pray return them to me."

"Prayers?" said the Egyptian laughing, "really? Oh, you pious, faithful Isaac!"

The overseer was already unrolling the papyrus, already beginning to look for the commencement; Isaac saw the executioner's axe at his neck, and stretched his hand convulsively towards the scroll; a groan escaped his choked throat.

"It can't be made out," said the overseer, and the papyrus was flung from his hands into the fire burning near by to dry the wet bricks.

With what a relieved heart Isaac watched the destruction of the fatal document may be imagined.

When he reached home towards evening Rebecca, controlling her excitement, came to meet him.

"See, Isaac," she whispered, "my dancing brought me in money enough to-day to buy a lantern with glass sides and this dagger. We shall need both for, as soon as darkness shrouds the roofs of Memphis, I want you to risk the hazardous trip to the treasure-house."

Isaac turned pale. When Rebecca saw how gladly he would have deferred the execution of the plan she

began to laugh, threw her arms around his neck, caressed him, stroked his pale cheeks, and begged him to summon up his courage. The instant the moon rose she would glide to the palaces to ensnare the guards by her wiles, and during this time he was to remain hidden among the Nile rushes until she called him.

“Courage, Brother,” said the crafty beauty smiling. “You are trembling like a sick dancing-girl, how can you bear the sight of the royal treasures? The spectacle will stifle you. Be as calm and solemn as an Egyptian priest, when he bows before his god of stone. Walk through the streets as mutely and indifferently as the bull Apis when he is led in the procession, and let no human soul suspect what glowing plans you are fostering in your breast. I’ll take the dagger myself; it will drop from your trembling hands, but I, the bee, need a sting.”

“Do you think me so cowardly?” said Isaac, “if I tremble it is with anticipation and delight; all my veins are strained to the work like bow-strings.”

Rebecca led him gaily to a table well covered with viands, declaring that a full stomach is the spring of every lofty deed, an empty one brings an empty head, and God could never have made the world so beautiful if He had ever suffered hunger. She had toiled to earn the wine and roast meats by her singing, but he must eat without care, she should be satisfied by looking on. Isaac fell upon the food with astonishing avidity, while Rebecca was delighted to see his appetite. At last she reminded him that the dishes seemed empty and that

the moon was up; it was time to set out on their secret venture. Isaac was just taking the lantern when some one knocked violently at the door and, without waiting for a welcome, an Egyptian official, wearing a striped kerchief on his head, entered the room, unfolded a papyrus-roll, and held it towards the startled pair who expected instant arrest.

"Read," he said curtly, "do you understand? Why do the Jewish trash stand staring at me as if I were a mummy risen from the tomb?"

Rebecca was the first to recover her presence of mind. Glancing over the document she said to Isaac, while the official was putting away the roll: "All Jews are forbidden—so this papyrus proclaims—to leave their houses to-day or to-morrow because Rameses, the Son of the Sun, has returned victorious from the campaign against the Chetas."

"Yes," replied the official, "your presence must not profane the festal procession, you jackals. But you might give me a kiss, Jewess, you are confoundedly pretty; you look like the goddess Isis they paint smiling sweetly upon the walls of the temple. Come, you little white sedge-serpent, let me catch you."

Rebecca, laughingly defended herself as the rough, tawny-skinned Egyptian pressed fiercely forward, offering her rich gifts. Soon others came, bringing wine and disputing for the Jewess' favor. Isaac angrily sought his couch; the delay was very inopportune and he tried to devise means of escape, while Rebecca's gay boon-companions went into an adjoining room,

from which songs and laughter soon echoed through the quiet house.

Meantime Menes had permitted no day to pass without eagerly striving to meet Myrrah in some way or at some place ; but unluckily for a long time he was unsuccessful. An ardent, consuming emotion took possession of his dreamy nature ; her absence kept his imagination constantly on the stretch, in waking visions he saw her before him and in the streets he allowed no face to pass him unseen. It became evident that she was intentionally avoiding him.

One morning he was walking up and down the bank of the Nile half a league from Memphis, studying an astrological work. The place was very still ; shut in by tall rushes it seemed made for a private study. The birds twittered in the distance among the reeds, the frogs sang their monotonous chant, the quiet life of the aquatic animals afforded an opportunity for many thoughtful reflections. "Would it not be supposed," he said to himself, "when we watch these little creatures floating pleasantly about in the sparkling water, that they were perfectly happy ! Yet for each one lies in wait another that wants it for food. Not one is sure of its life, existence to each is a mere reprieve, many of these animals are only created to supply the larger ones with food. One of these patches of rushes is a miniature image of human existence." Menes had just

stopped to save a snail from the jaws of a worm-like mollusk, when a cry uttered close by fell upon his ear. It was a human scream! Who could be near? Perhaps some woman while drawing water had been surprised by a crocodile. Yet crocodiles were rarely seen so close to the city. He listened intently; the cry was not repeated; the scorching heat of the sun brooded over the sparkling Nile, the sedges rustled softly. Had he been mistaken? Was it a bird's scream? He walked around a dense clump of rushes, shaded his dazzled eyes with his hand, and to his great surprise saw among the reeds, as if he were gazing through a lattice, a human figure. The form was standing erect in the water, the head, covered with a kerchief, drooped feebly on the breast; the feet were concealed by the waves. She stood like the stone statue of a goddess. Ay, it was a woman who stood there, yet in some mysterious way did not sink. Menes pushed the rushes wholly aside—by all the gods! Was it she? She, whom he had vainly sought? Myrrah! And what was her situation? What was she doing there? His chest heaved passionately and going close to the water's edge he called: "Myrrah! What are you doing? How came you here?"

As the words were uttered the young girl's features visibly quivered, she bent her little head still lower, and made a repellent gesture. Now that this movement stirred the water around her figure Menes perceived that she was standing on a floating log, still bearing a few green boughs as it drifted slowly down the tide.

Had she voluntarily sought this dangerous support, or had the trunk served as a means of escape? Why didn't she try to pull the log ashore? She might easily have done so, there were bushes growing everywhere.

"I'll help you reach the bank," he called, and hastily knotting several long rushes together he flung the rope on the tree-trunk, now scarcely ten paces from the shore.

"Catch the end, then I can pull you across!" he exclaimed, delighted to be able to render the young girl this little service. But he was paralyzed with astonishment when Myrrah made no movement to stoop and seize the rushes. They fell beside her, and she remained motionless.

"Do me the favor to take the rope before the log drifts farther out into the stream," he called. She still stood with drooping head, motionless and unheeding.

"What has happened?" murmured the startled youth. Myrrah seemed perfectly conscious, yet she resembled a corpse rather than a living woman. He repeated still more urgently his entreaty that she would grasp the rope; finally, noting that the trunk was gradually drifting away from under the knotted rushes, he shrieked to her in absolute despair. Nay, he even used angry words, upbraided her for her levity, declared that it was her duty to save herself for him. All proved futile, nothing made any impression upon the unfortunate girl.

Suddenly there was a strange, rustling noise among the reeds growing on the right; the stalks crackled mys-

teriously, sometimes the stones or branches grated as if some heavy object were being dragged over them. Menes shuddered, his lips grew livid, and he unconsciously wrung his hands—he saw something green moving and glittering among the bushes. The colossus drew nearer, its scaly armor moving smoothly along; Menes's eyes rested despairingly, now on Myrrah's slender figure, then on the terrible denizen of the river that scenting human flesh was creeping forward, dragging its rough lizard-tail easily through the swaying stalks.

“You are lost—a crocodile!” He could say no more. Myrrah crouched lower, hiding her face in her lap, apparently preparing to meet the hideous fate she had probably expected. Once she half raised herself and stretched her hands towards Menes as though thanking him, then sank back into her former attitude. The youth at first stood paralyzed. What was he to think of Myrrah? Was not this the conduct of a lunatic? If the girl before him was not mad, her behavior could be prompted by no other motive than a firm resolve to die—it shone in her sorrowful eyes, expressed itself in her whole bearing.

“But she shall not die,” cried a voice in his soul. The monster was still at some distance, escape was yet possible. Fairly frantic, he tore the rope of rushes out of the river, made a noose at one end, and flung it once more among the branches projecting from the floating log. “Oh! ye gods, let it fasten! Let the noose catch!” he prayed, “the lives of two human beings

are hanging by this rope, for her death will be mine also."

He pulled. Ah! the gods were gracious! The trunk moved, the noose had caught. But the rope was weak, he saw that the rushes were separating, and tried not to notice it; he must pull, pull, ere the monster's jaws, filled with bristling teeth, approached; he *must* succeed, the gods would give the fragile reeds the firmness of iron. Slowly the log floated nearer; the crocodile became more plainly visible among the sedges, it did not seem disposed to let its prey escape. Menes hurled fierce glances at the reptile, as if mere looks had power to destroy.

At last the log touched the shore, he raised the cowering figure and running at full speed bore her in his arms a long distance from the shore, where beyond the crocodile's reach he laid the exhausted girl down at the foot of a mound, bent over her, and called her by name. As Myrrah made no reply and merely pressed her head convulsively on her breast, he ventured to gently raise it. But he had scarcely touched her ere she started up; a bitter expression flitted over her pale features.

"You have saved me," she said harshly — "why? Did I call you? Did I claim your aid? No."

"Don't talk so wildly, Myrrah," said Menes in a trembling voice. His eyes filled with tears, as he continued: "How changed you are — do you hate me?"

"Hate you?" she asked in a hollow tone, as if in a dream.

"Yes, it seems so."

"And suppose it were . . ."

"Myrrah — you — oh! ye gods . . ."

"Be calm," she murmured. "You misunderstand me — I do not hate you, yet I must."

"Why do you seek death, unhappy girl?"

"Because I *must* hate you," fell in almost inaudible accents from her lips.

Then she smiled strangely.

"What do you care," she went on; "be happy with your boon-companions, tell them how you made a laughing-stock of a poor girl; it will amuse them, especially when you say that she was a Jewess. Be like the rest; it is wiser by far. Do you hear?"

With these words she hurried swiftly away, leaving Menes in a state of complete bewilderment and despair. His brain seemed paralyzed, and in pursuing the flying girl, he staggered like a drunken man.

When, a few days after, he sought Myrrah's house to obtain an explanation of her strange conduct, the inmates told him that she had gone, no one knew where.

CHAPTER IV.

A WARNING.

IN the southern part of the city, on the fertile shores of one of the Nile canals, stood the palatial mansion of a wealthy widow, Menes' mother. The pillars, halls, and

roof of the dwelling, gleaming with brilliant hues, rose from a dense sea of foliage. In an apartment which afforded a view of the extensive garden filled with fragrant flowers, the elderly lady sat in a gilded chair, furnished with crimson cushions, before a richly inlaid table on which glowed fruits in dainty baskets, while Egyptian, Ethiopian, and Hebrew slave-women were busied in lending to the matron's faded charms the deceitful semblance of youth. One black slave was zealously greasing the lady's skin with an oily, perfumed ointment; another was putting some red paint on her cheeks; a third, kneeling on the floor, held before her a mirror ornamented with a cat's face, and another, standing behind, was arranging the necklace that was to artfully conceal a bust somewhat too full. The chamber was richly painted; beautiful vases, costly glass vessels, statues, and candelabra adorned its walls, cushions invited repose; before the open window hung a transparent net, which afforded a view of the garden, steeped in sunlight, and permitted the entrance of delicate odors but prevented insects from approaching the sensitive skin of the mistress of the house. A gay-plumaged parrot, swinging on a gilt perch, screamed incessantly: "Eat and be joyful." Covers, bordered with red and yellow, drooped from several small cedar-wood tables, on which various ornaments were strewn, and numerous frames, hung with the lady's dresses, stood along the walls.

"Bear on hard, Hassura," her mistress murmured. "I think there is a wrinkle coming on my forehead."

"Oh, no," Hassura eagerly replied, though she had herself perceived the line with alarm. "Oh, no! What you take for a wrinkle is only a temporary softness of the skin. My beautiful mistress is as smooth as the leaves of the lotus-flower, her forehead is like the surface of the pond, or the metal mirror in which she sees herself."

"Oh, Mistress!" suddenly shrieked Ethiopian Assa, "by all the gods!—I scarcely dare to say it."

"What is it—speak!" cried the lady, anxiously grasping her hair, which Assa was arranging. Assa dropped the comb on the floor, and faltering: "I am innocent," sank at her mistress' feet.

"Will you ever speak?" demanded the latter.

"Another grey hair," fell from Assa's terrified lips.

"What do you say? You are lying!" replied Asso, the mistress; indignantly. "If you lie, I'll have your breast pierced with red-hot needles."

"Here, here! Oh, look, Mistress, and see if I lie," the maid anxiously protested, solemnly holding before the lady's eyes, between her thumb and finger, like a poisonous insect, the object of horror, a small white hair. Asso shook her head angrily.

"Burn it, Assa," she ordered at last resignedly, after convincing herself by careful investigation of the truth. "Burn it, and let neither Metophis, the highest Canal-officer, nor Metro, the nomarch, hear a word of it. Woe betide her who prattles—she dies. By Isis, she dies, for the nomarch yesterday gave me to understand that he would not be adverse to winning my hand. True,

he won't obtain it, but I'll have no lovers or flatterers driven away, which grey hairs will infallibly do. Netcro, the wig: Henceforth I'll wear a curly peruke."

While the women were occupied in fastening chains and scarabaei on their mistress' robes, a slave who had entered reported that all Memphis was already astir to admire the festal procession of the victorious Rameses. Rameses had wrested the arrears of tribute from the Chetas in a single battle; the hostile king had himself fallen into the conqueror's hands and would adorn the triumphal procession with his presence. The noble lady was just on the point of going to see this procession; her barge, painted red, gold, and blue, and manned by twelve strong oarsmen, was already waiting before the gate leading to the Nile-canal.

As soon as Asso had heard that all Memphis was pressing in motley throngs through the streets, she could scarcely control her impatience. The pins were fastened too slowly or else pricked her skin, the sandals would not fit, the kerchief on her head hung awry, in short none of the careful attendants served her to her satisfaction.

"Make haste, I shall be too late," she repeated incessantly, stamping her foot, sometimes even dealing blows with her hand when she thought the maids too clumsy. A slender Assyrian dropped a bracelet.

"Away with her!" cried her mistress furiously, "flog her till she bleeds."

The half-fainting girl was led away; the other women scarcely dared to breathe, a spell seemed to

rest on the room, all gazed trembling at their imperious mistress. At last the difficult task of the toilet was completed; the maids uttered a sigh of relief; the lady rose.

“When I was at court,” she said, looking at herself, the King often told me that I understood the art of dressing becomingly better than anyone else.”

At the word “court,” a thrill of awe ran through the whole group of servants. At the same moment strange sounds reached the room from a distance, sounds that made drops of cold perspiration start upon the attendants. They glanced timidly at each other, for they knew whence the cries came and who uttered them.

“Why! Why! I believe that is a woman groaning,” said Asso gaily, “can any of you tell me who is screaming so piteously?”

“Mistress, you yourself gave the order that the little Assyrian” — replied one of the women.

“Ah!” interrupted the widow, “because she injured the bracelet? — should be flogged? You are right. Very well.”

After a time the girl's shrieks of pain under the lash became more piercing. Asso pretended not to hear them.

“Pass me one of the fruit-baskets,” she said, and began to eat.

“Why, my bird sings prettily!” she cried, laughing, as the tortured slave uttered moans that might well have roused pity.

"My late husband," she added, "particularly praised the way I arranged the kerchief on my head. Move it a little towards the left, Hassura, — there, now it sets right. Yes, when I was at court," (the court was specially emphasized) "those were days indeed! You silly creatures would die of bashfulness if you should ever see such magnificence."

The anticipation of her triumph and the impression she hoped to make upon the spectators of the expected procession made her loquacious, she gave away little worn-out ornaments, and petted her parrot. Suddenly she turned to the steward of her country estate, an elderly Assyrian, who had just entered.

"Belises, I haven't seen my son Menes for nearly a fortnight. Have you any idea where the visionary fellow is roaming?"

"No, Mistress," the steward answered with a low bow, "I am as ignorant of Menes' movements as yourself. I saw him last in the temple of Apis, performing his morning devotions, then he disappeared."

"It is mysterious," said the widow, "he seems to avoid me. Well, it is true that we have nothing in common, our thoughts and feelings move in entirely different channels; nay, I must even frankly confess that I don't feel drawn towards him. Yet he ought to visit me sometimes; custom and decorum require it."

"Mistress," the steward began, after a short silence, "you said yesterday that Menes ought to marry. You made the remark in a careless tone. Was your intention to have him wed more serious than it seemed?"

“You remind me of a most important matter, Belises. It is time that Menes should undertake his father's offices and seek for himself a wife of equal rank. He has completed his studies in the priests' school of the temple of Ptah in Memphis, he has gathered all the treasures of wisdom, he has become versed in astronomy, mathematics, and medicine, he has learned how to carry on a war and rule a country; it is time for him to make use of his knowledge; he must play the idler no longer.”

At this moment a slave entered and announced that Metro, the Nomarch of Memphis, was waiting in the anteroom to escort the Lady Asso to the procession. Scarcely had he mentioned the nomarch's name, when an agitated smile flitted over the stern features of the matron. She instantly ordered the flogging of the slave-girl who had dropped the bracelet to be stopped, and dismissed Belises with the promise that she would discuss her son's affair with him some other time.

“What? He?” she cried. “Put some more rouge on my cheeks, Assa. Don't crush my collar so, Has-sura. Oh! you clumsy creatures.”

She fanned herself, arranged her dress again in the mirror with girlish vanity and, while walking towards the door, framed a graceful phrase of welcome. She had already opened it, when she started back with a loud cry, for before her, closely wrapped in a cloak, stood a slender figure.

Ere the stranger could be denied admittance, she glided cautiously into the chamber and Asso, with

speechless wrath, saw the intruder lay aside her mantle, make her a low bow, place her dainty feet, without asking permission, on a red embroidered stool, and finally introduce herself as — Rebecca, the Jewish dancer.

“And by what right, Jewess, dare you enter my room uninvited or unannounced?” imperiously demanded the noble dame. Do you know that I might have you scourged from my presence by my slaves, you base, shameless dancing-girl? Quick, leave this chamber, your presence profanes it.”

“Pardon me, noble lady,” said Rebecca, with a crafty smile. “You will speak very differently as soon as I tell you the cause of my presence here.”

“Well? I am curious to hear what a Jewess has to say to me.”

“What I have to say concerns your son.”

“Menes?”

“Even so.”

“Speak!”

“Not before witnesses; I will confide what I know of him only to you.”

“Needless caution, Jewess.”

“It concerns a secret scarcely fit for a mother's ears, far less those of slave-girls,” said Rebecca with impressive earnestness.

“You are jesting, hussy.”

“You will soon learn that my jest is a bitter one.”

“Do you mean to threaten?”

“I could almost find it in my heart to do so.”

Asso reflected; she had already by a gesture ordered

the Jewess to be turned out of the room, when the important expression of the dancer's face awakened her curiosity. She angrily commanded her attendants to leave her alone with the Jewess and then, with averted face, threw herself in an imposing attitude upon a divan.

"Speak," she murmured listlessly, plucking to pieces a bouquet she happened to have in her hand. "But be brief, I have no time to listen to your talk, which will probably turn out to be some begging affair."

"I must first entreat you not to betray me, noble lady," said Rebecca, seating herself modestly in a chair. "We Jews are forbidden to go out to-day; only the importance of the news I bring induced me to defy the command."

Asso waved her fan in assent. "Now tell me of my son, if you please," she added with sarcastic courtesy.

"Certainly, of Menes," replied the Jewess smiling. "Lady, it would be better to prepare yourself for what I have to say, the unexpected disclosure I must make might rouse you somewhat roughly from your contemptuous ease."

The widow tossed her head, as if to intimate that to amaze her would be an impossibility. One might as well try to shake a pyramid. A scornful smile flitted over her face.

"Your son Menes is in love," Rebecca now remarked in a tone of the utmost indifference.

The noble lady's calmness was instantly destroyed;

she dropped the bouquet with which she was toying and stared her visitor steadily in the face.

"What do you dare to say?" she asked, after a pause, in a hollow tone. "Menes loves without my consent? You don't know what you are talking about, I fear I am in the presence of a lunatic. I know my son."

"You know him? I am sorry, noble lady, to be forced to tell you that I know him better. He loves. Ay, indeed he does," cried Rebecca, with an easy laugh, "and loves — don't be too much horror stricken — one of my own race. Well? You are silent? You turn pale? You probably did not expect this? Yes, yes. Love is a strange, crafty device of the gods. It burns like serpent's poison and cools like honey. It makes us fools and sages at the same time. Of course, Menes ought to have been sensible enough to learn from you upon whom he was to fix the ardor of his heart, but the goddess of love, cat-headed Sechet, does not allow herself to be ruled; she bred in the blaze of noonday sultry vapors which she breathed into your Menes' soul, she rubbed her pretty cat's head against him, and before the poor youth was aware of it, she transformed the cat's head into a lion's — there he lies, torn by the pitiless monster's claws."

"You lie! You lie! You lie!" shrieked Asso, interrupting the speaker and, springing up like a tigress, she tore the cushions with fingers crooked like talons. "Repeat that horrible Hebrew lie again, you white, smooth serpent, and I'll scratch your eyes out; I'll

throw you into the swamps of the Nile, that the wild beasts may gnaw your accursed flesh. My son despises you as much as I do, you swarm of foul vermin, who are only tolerated on the banks of the Nile and have reason to fear being exterminated, like noisome weeds, at any moment. You lie, I tell you. Menes would not stoop so low, and though he may perhaps have found one of your race fair, be it so, the follies of his youth may be pardoned, and the goddess Sechet wants some insignificant victims. But note this — there is a distinction between love and love. My son will never seek a Jewess for his wife, never! And if I knew he cherished this plan, if I knew he — a Jewess — ah!”

She sank back upon the cushions exhausted, tore off her necklace and hurled it from her so furiously, that the gems danced upon the stone floor like drunken slaves. Calmly, but with secret amusement sparkling in her revengeful eyes, Rebecca now handed the widow a seal-ring set with an emerald beetle.

“Do you know this ring?” she asked.

“This ring—? It is—it is his,” gasped Asso. “Where did you get it? You stole it. Confess?”

“First release my arm, Lady,” said Rebecca, “I won’t leave you until you know the whole story. It will give me great pleasure to introduce you to your well-trained son’s mysterious mode of life.”

“So you know more of his life than I?” asked Asso, dropping her tormentor’s arm.

“Listen to me,” said the Jewess.

“I will,” replied the widow in a resigned tone.

"Tell me all you know! You seem to be more sincere than I believed at first. Give me your hand, Jewess, and accept the assurance that, if you truthfully report what my son has been doing without my knowledge, I will return the service in any way in my power. — Forgive me for allowing myself to be carried away by my rage."

"Very well," replied the girl, "I will agree to that, for you may suppose that I did not come here without a selfish motive. My trouble in spying out your Menes' secret paths deserves a reward."

"And what shall it be?"

"Make it possible for me to enter the king's presence," replied the Jewess, "I long to display my skill in dancing before the Son of the Sun. If you will accomplish this—and I know you can, for you are powerful—I will be your most faithful friend, you shall learn everything that happens in and out of Memphis,—for, as you know, we dancing-girls learn many a secret the king's vicegerent might envy—and I will be ready to disclose every detail of your son's adventure."

Asso felt somewhat flattered when Rebecca now began to laud the wealth, beauty, and influence of her patroness—as she called her. The Jewess, who perceived this with satisfaction, continued her compliments, making them still more fulsome. She extolled the lady's brilliant complexion and magnificent ornaments, nay, at last extended her praises even to the parrot and the cat.

Asso, in return, promised to have her friend introduced to the king by the chief-priest, Psenophis of Thebes; Psenophis was coming to Memphis in a few days to inspect the temple and she would call on him at once.

The Jewess gratefully threw herself at the lady's feet, beseeching her gracious patroness to let her take her hand, a favor condescendingly granted. The girl imprinted a kiss upon it, and then began to explain that she had often met Menes and, by watching him, discovered that he sometimes visited Myrrah, one of her friends. Myrrah had at first resolutely repelled his advances and Menes had then constantly wandered up and down the streets and squares Myrrah most frequented. Finally, after a long time, the poor love-sick fellow succeeded in saving the object of his passion from the jaws of a crocodile, and thus gained the opportunity of talking with her again.

"And what was the result of the interview?" asked the widow anxiously.

"They parted on the most hostile terms," Rebecca continued. "Menes lost all trace of the girl."

"The gods be thanked!" cried Asso, "perhaps she is dead; he'll give up his senseless designs if he no longer sees her."

"You are mistaken, noble lady," replied Rebecca smiling, "he only pursues his senseless plan with still more ardent zeal."

"What? And she . . . ? The temptress — Myrrah is still alive?"

“She is; you shall hear how they met again.”

Hitherto Asso had listened to the story with tolerable calmness; she scarcely seemed anxious, for she regarded her son's love affair as a slight childish disease, which attacks everyone; she even smiled as she murmured: “Dear, dear! I never looked for that under his decorous manner! No matter. It will make his fortune at court.”

But, as Rebecca now continued her tale Asso's placid features changed till they were fairly disfigured by rage; her eyes flashed with fury and she paced swiftly up and down the room, shattering the vases and glass ornaments that stood in her way. Rebecca frankly informed the enraged woman that since the day before, Myrrah had been almost under the same roof with her future mother-in-law. Menes was concealing the girl in the outer garden-temple, adjoining the Nile canal. Asso of course thought this incredible.

“How can he have the insolence!” she shrieked. “How is such a thing possible! How can the wench have reached there? Speak, for I must find out the whole affair.”

Rebecca told the following story.

One evening Myrrah's flowers had found a more scanty sale than ever. She had disposed of only one small bouquet, which was purchased by a bold young soldier, an archer. He chose it amid all sorts of offensive jests and, after turning over all the flowers as a pretext for lingering in her society, at last went away, saying in

excuse that he could not make a selection. Myrrah, terrified by his coarse jokes and strange glances, uttered a sigh of relief when he had gone, and with a sorrowful smile gathered up her fragrant wares to return home. But she had scarcely entered the Jewish quarter when she heard footsteps behind her and, pausing in terror, she saw a figure approaching through the darkness. Summoning all her courage she fled as fast as her fatigue and the heavy basket of flowers would permit, but ere she reached her house she felt some one clasp her around the waist from behind. Menes, she knew, would not be so bold; a stranger, whom she could not recognize, drew her towards him with fierce, eager caresses which filled her with loathing. Terror almost choked her voice, she dared not look around; when she at last did so, she recognized the young archer who had bought her flowers.

"I watched you," he panted. "Forgive me, fair Jewess. I am fairly melting with love for you, permit me to accompany you home."

"Let me go," cried the helpless girl, "I can have nothing to do with you; you know how strictly the laws punish any one who sins against them. Away!"

The young Egyptian did not heed her threat. Myrrah, no longer able to support herself, fell upon her knees, raising her hands beseechingly to the soldier. He seized her by the arm, and dragged her towards a dark cross street. The girl was on the verge of fainting, but at that moment she saw steel flash close beside her. A well-known arm was thrust between her and

her persecutor ; a cry fell on her ear ; warm drops of blood sprinkled her face, and the shameless reprobate lay groaning on the ground.

“ So much of the scene,” said Rebecca, continuing her story, “ I witnessed from my hiding-place ; can you guess the name of the girl’s deliverer, noble lady ?”

“ Do you really believe Menes tore the young Egyptian’s prize from his grasp ?” asked the widow.

“ I would swear it,” replied the Jewess.

“ How can a young man allow himself to be so carried away !” said Asso. “ As if a Jewess’ honor were worth an Egyptian’s life. Oh ! ye gods, why did not Menes come fifteen minutes later, he would then have had plenty of time to kill the soldier, and drown Myrrah — for aught I care — in the Nile.”

“ The goddess of love determined otherwise,” replied Rebecca, and there was a flash of anger in her eyes as they rested on the widow’s cold, unloving face.

“ When I afterwards visited the scene of the incident,” she continued, “ I found this ring, which, as you yourself said, Ménes had worn. I could not control my curiosity and, stealing after the pair, saw the young man supporting Myrrah till, with his assistance, she was able to walk slowly on. I followed them through the city, but finally lost sight of them. Menes vanished with his fair companion behind a clump of bushes and I did not see him again till he was near your garden, my lady. He was then carrying the struggling Myrrah in his arms, her white cloak glimmered through the

darkness as Menes moved swiftly on and soon disappeared from my gaze."

"And you believe that he concealed his living burden here in my garden?" said Asso. "Do you think an act of insolence, so closely bordering upon madness, possible?"

"What is impossible to a lover?" replied Rebecca, laughing. "Does not my beautiful mistress know from experience that a lover is a madman? I should think at court"

"Silence!" Asso commanded with dignity, "keep to the serious part of the matter. At any rate," she added in a hollow tone, "what you have witnessed is worth an investigation — and if it proves that . . . if Menes really . . . if this Jewess is under my roof! Oh! by the eternal sunshine, I will . . ." her voice was lost in inarticulate murmurs of rage. She clenched her hands and stamped her feet. Rebecca watched the proud woman's sufferings with secret triumph, she did not grudge her her wrath. When a slave entered to remind Asso of the waiting nomarch and the festival, the widow sent word to the distinguished visitor that a violent headache made it impossible for her to accompany him, he must do without her that day.

"I love my son, Rebecca heard the mother murmur, "I love him; I would fain see him raised above the heads of other men; he must not fix his heart on what is base, squander his strength. By the sun's light! It is time to remove him from the scene of this inactive dreaming and put an end to his unworthy dissi-

pation and youthful follies; he must go to Thebes and show his talents before his sovereign's eyes. I'll end this Jewish love affair at once."

The widow was just arranging a plan with the dancing-girl to bring her son's mysterious adventure to light, when she saw Menes himself through the open doorway as he strolled slowly, lost in thought, down the colonnade. She instantly signed to Rebecca to conceal herself, for Menes was apparently approaching the room. The Jewess glided behind the green curtain that covered the couch. Asso drew it smooth, pushed a table and chair in front of it and, taking a papyrus roll in her hand, seated herself in a careless attitude, as if she were absorbed in study; but meantime she cast impatient glances through the chink of the door.

"Everything must be discovered now," she whispered behind the curtain, "I will watch what is passing in his soul. If he has any secret in his heart, it will not remain concealed from my maternal penetration two minutes, dissimulation is foreign to his nature; it is more difficult for him to lie than for a courtier to tell the truth. Unfortunately he is often too veracious."

She now watched her son as he slowly approached, and instantly noticed, as a suspicious sign, that he had paid more attention to his outward man than usual. His linen robe was faultlessly white and he even wore around his left wrist a gold bracelet, an adornment of his person she had never seen before, even when he appeared on high festival days in the temple. Her

pleasure in his slender, beautiful figure was sufficiently embittered by the conjecture — now almost a certainty — that against her will he had become intimate with creatures of inferior race; yet a smile of satisfaction flitted over her face as she saw how gracefully he bent the flowers on their stalks, the bold carelessness with which he had arranged his kerchief and cloak, and the elasticity of his smooth arms in following every movement of his body.

“He could make his fortune at court,” she murmured, “it’s a pity he is too honorable, he’ll ruin everything by that.”

Menes, in his slow advance, dreamily scanned the statues, pillars, and painted walls. His mother vainly strove to find in his thoughtful features any trace of the secret criminal, the disgrace of her family; there was no sign of timidity in his manner, nothing which seemed to indicate that he was concealing an illicit connection from the persons about him. Yet she noticed one thing: a joyous expression, which she had never perceived before, often sparkled in the young man’s eyes; the glance, usually fixed so dully on the ground, to-day sometimes flashed with enthusiastic fire. Now he had reached the door; without knowing what he was doing he pushed it open, but instead of drawing back startled at the sight of his mother as he would formerly have done, he smiled and nodded to her. Asso did not believe her own eyes; never before had he done this, he had always showed his mother, as mistress of the house, constrained respect, submissive

obedience, but no friendly confidence. The widow, by a wave of the hand, invited her son to sit down.

“Why are you so gaily dressed to-day?” she asked.

“Why not?” he replied.

“It is not your usual custom,” she said enquiringly.

“Then, for your sake, it shall become my custom.”

“You are feeling well to-day,” the widow remarked.

“Do you think so?” he asked, smiling. “Perhaps! The air is so invigorating or the sun shines brighter. I don't know. The whole earth certainly seems to have grown fairer since yesterday, the flowers have a sweeter fragrance and the gods, whom I formerly called cruel tyrants, have become loving friends to me. Yes, dear mother. Our gods have made a delightful world.”

“Your whole nature seems transformed,” said the mother. “It is very suspicious.”

“Suspicious?”

“Have you nothing to confess to me?”

“To confess to you? Yes, you are right. I have to acknowledge . . .”

“Well? What? Speak openly.” Her eyes rested intently on his features.

“That yesterday evening,” he added, smiling, “I ordered your steward to give me a goblet full of the wine of Byblos.”

Asso gazed into the youth's face with a puzzled look.

Then she began to complain that he neglected her, asked where he had been of late, and how he had passed his time; but Menes' sole answer to her numerous questions was the same indifferent smile, or curt, fragmentary sentences, of which she could make nothing. To the inquiry how his studies were progressing, he replied: "it is a very fine day." When Asso spoke of his absence of mind, he said that he had never been so clear headed. His nature is completely changed, thought the mother, suppressing her rising indignation. What has become of his former reserved, sullen bearing? Where is his constraint in my presence? He scarcely shows me due respect. Her suspicions increased when Menes suddenly, without any cause, enthusiastically admired the beauty of the garden seen through the window. His mother tried to stop his poetic raptures, but he paid no heed to her sharp interruptions. At last she completely lost her composure; struggling to find words, she permitted him to press a kiss upon her hand — which he had never done before — and gazed after him in amazement as he slowly withdrew, constantly nodding pleasantly to her. Asso wished to call him back, but her bewilderment was too great and she merely shook her head in silence. Menes had scarcely left the room when Rebecca glided out of her hiding-place.

"Well, noble lady," she began, laughing, "who behaves in this way? Did you notice him? Nobody acts so except fools and lovers. Menes is no fool — I need not express the inference. You have convinced

yourself that in his joy he scarcely knows whether he is in Egypt or already in the realms of the blest. Show him a hideous toad, like those worshipped by the priests of Baal in Phœnicia, and he'll take it for a star fallen from heaven; hold Nile mud with its horrible stench before him, and he'll think he smells the oil of white lilies you keep in your ointment cups. The world to him is a rose, whose leaves he eagerly flings at his Myrrah's feet. I know such enthusiasts, my profession has made me fathom the power of the goddess of love. Ay, it would scarcely be believed that a beautiful arm, a well-shaped foot, would turn a sensible man into an enraptured child."

Asso threw herself back upon the cushions of her couch, and groaning aloud, pressed her clenched hands upon her brow, exclaiming incessantly: "It must be brought to light, I'll fathom the affair, and if what you suspect is true, Jewess, woe betide him."

The widow had long cherished the plan of sunning herself in the splendor of her son's rank, after he had once made his fortune at court. He was to be the key that should open the magnificent apartments of the royal palace, which had been closed to her since her husband's death. Her heart swelled at the thought of being again permitted to dine at the king's table as in the days of her youth; of once more hearing the rustle of the purple curtains in the corridors, breathing the fragrance of the costly incense whose violet clouds floated around the glimmering columns of the palace. Her imagination was wholly occupied by visions of

power and grandeur, she saw nothing but bowing courtiers, the waving robes of priests, gold embroidered hangings, and women's garments sprinkled with emeralds. And were all these enchanting anticipations to be destroyed by a poor vagabond Jewess? Was Menes, by such a marriage, to make a career at court impossible? Unprecedented! Rebecca's eyes sparkled with joy as she listened to the threats and curses the furious mother poured forth against her son; the dancer longed for revenge upon the man who had rejected her own love and offered his heart to another.

After the lady's wrath was somewhat soothed, Rebecca began to show her how easy it would be to surprise the two lovers in the evening. They must first ascertain in which of the numerous garden temples he had concealed Myrrah; then, as soon as night closed in, they would both go to the spot to obtain the desired explanation and punish the culprits. After Rebecca, with many low obeisances, had left the room, Asso suddenly remembered that the gardener had complained the day before that many of his beds had been trampled by careless feet. She sent for the man, who said that over by the farthest summer-house, where the garden adjoined the canal, several flower-beds were utterly destroyed. This little building stood on a small mound, and he had stationed several watchmen there to seize the bold intruder if he should come that way again.

"Well," asked Asso eagerly, "he did not come again?"

"No," replied Petefi, "but my lads think they

have seen light shining through the chinks of the window in the temple — and”

“ Well ? Why do you hesitate ? Speak out.”

“ I don't know whether I ought to say it.”

“ I command you, speak”

“ Pardon me, Mistress — perhaps it would be better for me to keep silence — permit me to go — I have said too much”

“ This isn't usually your way, my good Petefi — speak, speak on — I beg you”

“ Well, then, if you insist upon it — hm ! you see — the lads declare that they met the young master yonder near the temple.”

“ What ? Menes ?”

“ Menes, my lady !”

“ At night ?”

“ At night. Wrapped in a cloak.”

“ Really ? Really ? And what was he doing there ?”

“ Some say,” the gardener added in a mysterious tone, as he saw Asso turn pale, “ some say he vanished in that very temple.”

“ Vanished ?”

“ And they could hear praying and whispering within.”

“ Indeed ! Very well.”

The old servant shook his head doubtfully.

“ The signs multiply,” said Asso to herself, when the man had gone. “ At first I wouldn't believe the

strange tale — but now ” — she paused — “ no, no ! Surely he cannot so far forget himself ! Perhaps he is pursuing his studies in the temple.” This now seemed to her the most probable explanation. The little building stood on a low hill, from which he could watch the stars ; his priestly tutors had often pointed out the constellations to him from the roof of the villa. This idea, too, agreed with what the gardener told her on the following day. He had seen Menes carry something muffled in cloths out into the garden. What if it were astronomical instruments. Yes ! Of course ! She knew that astronomy, with the inferences deduced, must remain a secret to the uninitiated ; it was for this reason that her son had concealed from her his study of the heavenly bodies. Might not the dignified manner he suddenly showed be due to his having discovered in the sky great truths and happy portents, — that the stars were favorable to him and his life ? The next day she asked Menes plainly how he stood in his astronomical lessons. He seemed surprised, and tried to evade the question. Asso intimated that she wished to be present at least *once* during his nocturnal studies. This so startled Menes that he dropped the dish a slave had handed him and stared at his mother with a pallid face.

“ Calm yourself, my dear son,” she said, “ I have no desire to penetrate the mysteries of the gods. You will not believe me so misguided that I shall burden your conscience by demanding explanations of the divine secrets. Oh, no ! I merely want to have a

glimpse of the temple where you doubtless keep your apparatus and pursue your studies."

"Mother, what do you ask?" stammered the bewildered youth, "you know it is death for the uninitiated"

"I know, I know, my dear boy. Yet, nevertheless, I beg you to take me this evening to the little garden temple."

"Impossible," he faltered, "you do not know what you desire."

"I know *exactly* what I desire."

"Mother"

"Your hesitation is strange — Menes! Does your work so greatly fear the light? Are you doing anything unlawful in the temple?"

Her voice grew sharp and threatening.

"Unlawful? No!" he said firmly.

"Well? Then I will be present at your work."

After a pause of the most painful embarrassment, Menes said blushing:

"Well, then! You can have a glimpse of the temple, but I must first tell the high-priest of your intention. Without his permission your visit might be misinterpreted."

"Really?" asked the widow. "If that is so, I will yield my wish. I should not like to rouse the stern high-priest's anger against you, nor involve myself in difficulties. Whatever you may be doing at night in the building, you need not disturb yourself. I will act as if I knew nothing about your studies."

Menes uttered a sigh of relief. But Asso was now still more firmly resolved to visit the place on some future night. She secretly hoped that she should find no one whom her son loved concealed within, but had a fixed conviction that he was perhaps adoring in the temple some foreign deity, possibly the Assyrian Baal or As-tarte, whose notorious worship, though not forbidden in Egypt, people preferred to hide from the public gaze.

"I would rather see him swinging the censer before the image of the Phœnician Mylitta, than worshipping a living Jewess," murmured the selfish mother.

CHAPTER V.

THE TREASURE-SEEKERS.

"HAVE you the lantern?" asked Rebecca.

"Yes."

"And the dagger?"

"Yes."

"Then shut the door and follow me into the street. Or give me the lantern, I will hide it under my cloak."

Isaac closed the metal slide over the light, and the brother and sister stole softly down the stairs, opened the door, and emerged into the dark street to undertake their perilous but remunerative work, the discovery of the promised treasure, which was to bring them wealth. Neither felt perfectly at ease as they glided along,

casting searching glances around them, in the shadow of the houses; but Rebecca was at least far calmer than Isaac, who betrayed his agitation by the shrill, whistling gasps in which he drew his breath. For a long time they did not exchange a word, and shrank timidly away from all who passed. They had crossed the Hebrew quarter of the city, and their first task was now to slip through the chain of sentinels that surrounded this district, for the Jews were still forbidden to leave their houses. True, Rebecca knew that this law would not be rigidly enforced in regard to a dancing-girl, and was only anxious about her brother's safety.

"Keep close by my side," the girl suddenly exclaimed in a startled tone. "I see two soldiers standing yonder." They turned into a narrow side street; but here, too, it was difficult to pass, for a broad flood of light poured from a large window upon the pavement, and through the panes they saw several, perhaps eight, fierce-looking Egyptian police officers carousing around a table. Wild peals of laughter echoed through the door of the house.

"Wouldn't it be better for us to turn back?" Isaac said hesitatingly. "To-morrow night will do as well as to-night—it was foolhardy for me to follow your advice."

"Don't be so timid, Brother!" replied Rebecca, "you make me laugh. How often must I tell you that this is the very best night we could possibly find for our enterprise. Yesterday the great Rameses passed

through our city on the way to Thebes, to-day is the second celebration of the festival, that is, every honest citizen and brave soldier has to sleep off the well-earned headache produced by the fiery Kakem wine. If we don't find the treasure to-night, we never shall."

"Who knows whether this treasure may not have been taken to Thebes long ago," whispered Isaac. "I should be surprised if we found it still in the old store-house. Our father was a young man when he helped hew the vault; long years have passed since then."

"No matter, we'll try our luck," said the girl. "I'm far from giving up the battle as lost."

Both now stooped down and crept past the lighted windows of the tavern; but either one of the soldiers saw the shadows of the pair on the opposite house, or Isaac did not steal by cautiously enough, for scarcely had the brother and sister gone ten paces from the perilous spot, when loud shouts arose behind them."

"There they go."

"No! Here."

"I see them at the end of the street. Aha! a woman, too."

"Let's seize them. They are certainly Jews." Such were the shouts ringing behind the fugitives, who tried to double their speed. The attempt to escape was vain, their flight only increased their pursuers' suspicions, so Rebecca stopped and, calming herself by a violent effort, waited for the men to come up.

"What do you want of us?" she asked boldly.

"Hear the impudent wench," cried a stalwart

charioteer, "she acts as if we were the criminals. But you seem to be a pretty creature, you saucy thing."

He pushed the kerchief back from her head as he spoke.

"Where have you been?" cried the others. "Where are you going! What are you doing in the streets at night? Oho! A lantern, a rope, they're surely on some thieving expedition."

"I'm a dancer," said Rebecca fearlessly, while Isaac passed his hand timidly across his brow. "Can I play on the harp or dance for you? It's to make money that you see me wandering about the streets so late."

"A dancing-girl, a dancing-girl!" shouted the crowd exultingly.

"But your companion, who stands there as if he'd like to turn himself into a mummy, what is he doing with you?" asked the stout charioteer.

"It is my brother," replied the girl, "he will protect me against your rude assaults."

There was a general laugh.

Rebecca was now led in triumph to the tavern, while Isaac was unceremoniously locked into a little wash-house that stood in the courtyard. A sentinel was stationed in front, the only means of fastening the door being a wooden bolt on the outside. Rebecca entered the tavern. Her thoughts dwelt anxiously on her imprisoned brother, and she taxed all the powers of her inventive brain to devise some means of rescuing him and herself from their uncomfortable position; but of

course she did not venture to let this be perceived, so she laughed and shouted with such extravagant mirth, that even keener observers than these wine-bibbing soldiers would never have guessed what was passing in her restless, troubled heart. All gathered round the dancer, who, after laying aside her outer garments, came out into the centre of the hall. General applause greeted her performance, but when it was over she heard a harp-player, whom she had not noticed before, say loudly: "The Jewess may dance tolerably well, but she can't play the harp as skilfully as I."

Rebecca turned and saw a bold-faced girl leaning against a young archer's breast. The latter kissed her, protesting: "Yes, nobody in Egypt can play the harp like Rhodopis."

An idea suddenly flashed into Rebecca's scheming brain. Her plan was formed, and she answered carelessly: "That depends upon circumstances, allow me to say that I don't play the harp badly myself."

So two parties were made; one declared Rhodopis inimitable, the other group favored Rebecca. The latter fanned the dispute by clever witticisms, flung like fire-brands into the hearts of the drunken spectators. At last she pretended to take offence and burst into a flood of tears, which of course powerfully excited the sympathy and rage of her own faction. The young archer laughed and kissed his fair one, exclaiming that whoever upheld Rebecca knew nothing about the art of harp-playing, his ears were as deaf as those of the stone colossus. They need only compare Rebecca's fingers

with the dainty hands of Rhodopis; wasn't it like a hippopotamus' hoof beside a lotos-flower? Wasn't Rhodopis as slender as a papyrus-reed swaying in the wind?

The opposing party violently disputed this assertion.

"Don't cry," said the herculean charioteer, "whoever insults you must deal with me. I'll throw my wine-cup at that young dog's skull, if he dares compare you to a hippopotamus again. Here, take the harp and play us a tune."

Rebecca had scarcely struck a note when her enemies made such an uproar by whistling and shouting, that her drinking song could not be heard. Her own party now called: "Hush! Silence! Let her play! Listen!"

Vain! When at last, as the girl coolly sang on, a goblet was flung upon the strings of the instrument, the gigantic charioteer's rage was roused to its utmost height. Snatching the harp from Rebecca's hands, he dashed it so violently on the archer's pate that the frame of the instrument rested on his shoulders, while the broken strings whirred around his head. This was the signal for battle. In an instant arms, legs, chairs and tables formed a confused heap. Wine-vessels, hurled by bare arms, flew like balls through the room, glass goblets were shattered on the bald heads of the combatants, swords and axes were drawn; the gay decorations painted on the floor were already stained with blood. The Jewess took advantage of the moment,

glided out of the door unseen, slipped the bolt of Isaac's prison, and by signs informed him of what had occurred. Her brother, who had heard the noise of fighting, instantly understood the state of affairs; the man ordered to guard him had long since yielded to the attraction of a tussle, so that the brother and sister reached the street unmolested, from whence they hastened on as fast as possible to gain the harbor of the city and evade pursuit.

"Are you unhurt?" asked the sister.

"Entirely," Isaac replied.

They made no farther allusion to the incident which had detained them, the thought of approaching their destination swallowed every other feeling. They had reached the haven, in whose calm waters the mighty giantess, Memphis, bathed her granite feet. The masts of the ships towered aloft in the darkness, the stone staircase rose majestically before their gaze, but only the night-wind and the moonlight glided over the enormous steps; far behind them the confused multitude of countless roofs vanished in the gloom, some appearing to be lost in the vault of the night-heavens. The monotonous wash of the waves against the wooden sides of the galleys sometimes interrupted, with its melancholy sound, the profound, desolate silence. Isaac softly unfastened from the bank a small skiff, which they entered without speaking. As the door of the treasure-house, as their father had described it, was just at the level of the Nile, they could only reach the interior in this way. Isaac handled the oars very cautiously, and without

exchanging a word they moved up the Nile, passing the vast temples, palaces, private residences, and public buildings of Memphis, reflected with silent, gloomy grandeur in the moonlit waves. The porticos looked like slumbering giants, petrified gods, awaiting the end of the world to rise in menace and destroy the human race. The city was soon left behind. On one side of the river arose the yellow limestone mountains, glimmering with a spectral lustre in the moonlight and seeming to thrust their peaks in defiance towards the sky; on the other side rustled a grove of acacias. Farther away among the hills echoed the sharp barking of a jackal or the cry of a bird of prey. Papyrus plants grew in dense clumps on the water's edge; the strokes of the oars startled the birds that had perched among them. Then Rebecca laid her hand on her brother's shoulder and, as the latter looked up with a questioning glance, pointed towards the south. Above a grove of palm-trees two broad black, pyramidal masses towered side by side into the pale-blue night-heavens — they were the pylons of a palace.

“We are at the spot,” Isaac whispered; “one of those monsters is our treasure-house.”

The boat approached the first palace; the second appeared amid the thick bushes; and now, after a few more strokes of the oars, the treasure-house, a gloomy colossus, surrounded by wide-branching sycamores, stood before the excited pair. The poor Jew gazed at the building with a throbbing heart. So this was the place from which his fortune might come? Did these

mysterious, silent walls conceal the treasures which would transform his wretchedness into a blooming paradise? He dropped the oars, a feeling of mingled reverence and fear held him spellbound. Rebecca, too, held her breath; this massive, towering stone monster, fantastically illumined by the moonlight, produced an impression of gloomy sublimity even upon her utterly unsusceptible mind. For a time, shivering and trembling, she gazed upward to where the broad, flat roof cut sharply into the blue sky. But it was needful to act. Her keener eye was already anxiously searching, amid the motley figures and hieroglyphics scattered over the gigantic wall slanting upward before her, for the picture of the god Sebek with the crocodile head. Isaac, too, was gradually recovering from his surprise, and now scanned with cooler eyes the structure, which had at first seemed like a vast coffin; at last he saw in it only a huge chest of money. Carefully pushing the papyrus plants aside with his oars, he reached the palace wall.

"Do you see the god Sebek?" he asked softly.

"No, not yet."

"Stop, the moon is rising above the mountain peaks—now we can search better. But how still it is here! Not a breath of air, not even a ripple is stirring. Yes! A cool breeze just fanned me. See how the mountains gaze at us, it seems as if they were nodding. It makes me shudder."

"Don't be so foolish," replied Rebecca, "look at things as they are, not as they seem to you."

Far away the reeds stirred, and they heard a low lapping of water, a peculiar, rumbling sound.

"What's that?" asked Isaac.

The rushes snapped, the waves surged upward.

"Stop," whispered the girl, "perhaps a boat is coming, hide among the papyrus plants."

The rushing noise of the waves came nearer, the two adventurers pushed their boat among the bushes, expecting every instant to be discovered by some passing vessel. Then the air was filled with the sound of the loudest snorting Isaac had ever heard, and directly after a black mass swam sluggishly through the water.

"Calm yourself," said Rebecca, laughing, "we have been frightened by a hippopotamus. See, it has noticed us and is changing its course."

Isaac, drawing a long sigh of relief, raised his eyes to the palace, whose slanting wall was now steeped by the moonbeams in a greenish, melancholy light. The gaze of both treasure-seekers wandered over the confused mass of figures that seemed dancing in the moonlight above them. They searched a long time.

"Stop! There!" cried Rebecca at last.

"Where?"

"Give me the oars, I'll guide the boat in front of the picture."

The papyrus stems cracked under the skiff's bow, and it soon nestled close to the giant wall of the building. Right! There sat the god on his throne, with his crocodile head rigidly upraised, holding the lotos-blos-

som in his hand. A mysterious, lifeless figure, but at that moment it seemed to our friends alive. Isaac felt as if it might strangle him with its tawny hand, and shrank away as if it were a living being.

"Shall I press the spring?" asked Isaac.

"Yes! go on."

"I am afraid."

"Nonsense! Let *me* press it."

But Rebecca's own hand trembled visibly as she approached the lotos-blossom. Isaac lighted the figure with his lantern and the girl herself shuddered, for it seemed as if the god were looking her threateningly in the eye. Vexed by this weakness, she at last laid her hand on the white blossom. A low creaking sound was heard, followed by a metallic tinkling, as if two swords were slipping across each other, and the brother and sister now saw with astonishment the god move slowly back into the wall with a hollow, rumbling sound, that echoed uncannily among the vaults of the building. The door was made of brass, not stone, and its pulleys and springs, spite of the long years during which they had been unused, were as smooth and elastic as on the day of their first trial—or, the treasure-seeker asked himself anxiously: "Might not some of the king's officers sometimes enter this palace to inspect the valuables it contained? Was this the cause of the faultless mechanism." A perfectly dark passage now lay before the eyes of the brother and sister. Its black jaws stared at the pair as if it led to the netherworld, and he who trusted himself to it would

never more see the sunlight ; a dry, ice-cold air, which made them shiver, blew from this abyss of gloom like the breath issuing from the throat of a plague-stricken patient. Isaac, lighting the smooth, regular walls with his lantern, slowly entered the corridor, while his sister fastened the boat to a root that projected from the rocks, and then prepared to follow her brother.

"Don't forget to shut the door again," she said.

"I advise our leaving it open," replied Isaac, "who knows how difficult it may be to unfasten it, when we want to return."

"No, it must be shut," Rebecca answered positively, "how easily the open door might betray us to some passing boat."

She again gazed intently up and down the Nile to see if any human being was visible ; but as the surface of the water slept silently in the moonbeams and no sound interrupted the stillness save the occasional rustling of the sedges, she pushed the iron door back and carefully fastened the lock. They now stood alone within the vast walls, surrounded by gloom and mystery, far from all human aid, snatched from busy life, in a world where darkness was queen and silence seemed allied with death. Tremors of fear ran through the limbs of both, as they walked from one corridor to another, at first straight on, then down a flight of stairs, then on a level, next up again, then through an enormous hall, painted with savage, fiendish figures, and next through a smaller chamber.

After walking about fifteen minutes they stopped in

one of the large halls, whose ceiling was supported by columns, and whose walls were ornamented with glaring pictures of hunting-parties, battles, and sacrifices. They had already gone far below the surface of the ground, yet there was still no sign that they were approaching the coveted treasure. When the light of the young man's lantern pierced the dense gloom and glided over the gigantic walls it revealed nothing except columns, paintings, a pair of urns, or even a stone bench on which no human creature had ever sat. The tomb-like silence reigning here, the dark atmosphere that rested like a leaden weight upon the breast, the cheerless solitude, the grotesque death-dance of the pictures on the walls, threw the two wanderers into a state of gloomy, tremulous excitement.

"We must go on, Brother," Rebecca whispered, terrified by the sound of her own words as they were echoed back in hollow, muffled tones from the almost invisible ceiling, "I see the exit from this hall yonder — see! a little door leading into a passage! Quick, that we may reach our destination! Well, why do you stop? Are you afraid?"

"Not at all."

"Go on, then."

"Yes, but what is that dark spot hovering around me?"

"Probably a bat, what do we care? Courage, Isaac, consider that we are close to the most boundless treasure."

"If it is still in existence. I fear the trouble we

have taken in coming here has been all in vain; it goes on and on so Sister—halls, corridors, passages, chambers—just see how monstrous our shadows look, flitting along the wall.”

“Never mind your shadow. Don’t look about you.”

“I’m shivering so that my teeth chatter. This is too much like the abode of death.”

“Don’t talk so much, you are infecting me with your fear . . . Well, why do you suddenly stop and turn pale? Don’t drop the lantern, or we shall have to stay here till the end of the world.”

Isaac, after passing a projecting pillar, had stood still with bristling hair, panting breath, shaking limbs, and every sign of terror.

“Look,” he gasped—“look there . . .”

“Do you see ghosts?”

“Come here—woe betide us! There’s a man—see! buckling his sandals—what shall we do?”

“What do you say? A man down here? You are raving.”

Rebecca came forward, but started back just as Isaac had done. What was it? Really? A living man? Down here? A watchman perhaps? She took the lantern in her hand and boldly advanced a step, uttering a loud: “Who is there?” which was repeated in a strange, hollow echo—yes, there stood a man in a stooping posture—she stole on tiptoe to his side, throwing the light of the lantern upon the form, but had scarcely done so when, to Isaac’s intense as-

tonishment, a loud laugh escaped her lips — the figure proved to be only a picture painted in remarkably fresh, natural hues. After this discovery both uttered a sigh of relief, and passed on. They again traversed several halls of the subterranean palace, beholding the same monotonous scenes, meeting with the same tomb-like stillness, until at last the desolate chambers seemed to continue in such snail-like windings that the feeling of abandonment experienced by the brother and sister was enhanced by the terrible idea of finally becoming lost in this labyrinth of stairs and passages; for already the wick of the lantern was exposed, the larger portion of the oil had been used. What should they do, if it did not last long enough for them to find the way to the door? Both thrust the thought aside as much as possible; but a voice within imperatively protested that the entrance to the treasure must appear soon, very soon, or — they refused to look farther into the future.

They now stood on the edge of a pit about fifteen feet wide which had evidently been dug to stop a thief or swallow him up, if he incautiously pressed on. Rebecca looked at her brother. Isaac was gazing helplessly into the black gulf. Had fate resolved that their greed should not be satisfied? Had their father's confession perchance been prompted by the hallucinations of fever? Had no treasure ever existed? Or had it been removed again? Was this pit really the grave of their fortune, their hope?

“Oh, Father, you sent us to death,” Isaac mur-

mured, shuddering. "We must turn back, Sister, there is nothing to be found here save masonry and the stillness of the tomb. Come, let us go as fast as we can, before the light fails. My head is giddy, my limbs feel as if they were paralyzed by this continued excitement; I can scarcely stand."

"Oh! God of our Fathers, is it Thy will to destroy us?" Rebecca now asked with stifled fury. "No, Isaac, I will not outlive the outrage, the cruel disappointment our father has inflicted upon us. Oh, I should like to spit upon the grave of the dead King Seti for having played hide and seek with his treasures. We are defrauded, a demon has deluded us. Why should we live on? I had already imagined myself borne through the streets of Memphis in a magnificent litter, already in fancy worn a dress more beautiful than the queen's; you know, Isaac, I mean the material, thin as a spider's web, which allows the whiteness of the limbs to gleam through so bewitchingly. I saw myself covered with jewels. My necklace flashed with gems, beautiful maid-servants poured spikenard and costly ointments on my body, I fairly dripped with perfumed oils, played with the hearts of the most distinguished men in the kingdom.—I! Oh! I should like to throw myself into this gulf, for these glittering, airy visions will never become reality, and I cannot bear the disappointment."

Both were turning to go; Isaac had already reached the door of exit when Rebecca, without any special purpose, once more threw the light upon the pit.

"Nothing! Nothing at all!" she cried scornfully.

But what was that? What glittered yonder, half way up the opposite side of the opening? Was it a shield? She again lowered the lantern. Something flashed like metal. She called her brother and he, too, saw the disk. They consulted together.

"I'll try it," Isaac muttered excitedly, and fastening a rope he had brought with him around his waist, he went to the edge of the hole and slowly lowered himself down, while his sister knotted the rope around the foot of a stone bench. He could now reach the plate with his toes and kicked it — it sounded hollow. He let himself down still farther and grasped the metal with his hand; the blood was pulsing so fast in his brain that his eyes fairly rolled in their sockets. A handle projected from the wall. He seized the copper-ring and jerked it upward, again, again and — oh! rapture of joy! — pit, light, sister, everything, whirled around him — the metal disk yielded, and a narrow opening appeared. But was this really the entrance to the secret treasure? He crawled in. Rebecca, trembling violently, seized the lantern with her teeth, lowered herself down by the rope and crept after her brother, who had suddenly recovered his courage. On and on they went without uttering a word, half crazed with suspense; the narrow passage widened, a purple curtain closed it, they tore the veil aside — what would appear now? A blank wall? A door? No, neither — the light of the lantern was reflected a thousand

times, reflected so vividly that the brother and sister covered their eyes with their hands, for it seemed as if a thousand flashes of lightning were blazing from this chamber, which now lay open in all its dazzling gorgeousness before their startled gaze. "Triumph!" they shouted in the same breath; their torpor of amazement gave place to feverish haste, for the hall of riches had been found. They rushed into it, trod its costly carpets, felt its golden urns and vessels, its superb hangings, thrust their trembling fingers into chests filled to the brim with gold rings; the goal was reached, the long-desired treasure found. They rushed through this subterranean world of wealth like a couple of children; every object was curiously handled without any portion being appropriated, except that Rebecca, who regained her self-control more quickly than her brother, took a jewelled necklace. When Isaac gradually recovered from his intoxication of joy, he carefully threw the light of the lantern upon the lofty walls of the hall, and his attention was especially attracted by the order with which the valuables were arranged upon ivory tables. Garments lay about, boxes filled with rings or scarabæi stood open, glittering necklaces hung from golden frames, and gaily-embroidered purple cushions rested on richly-inlaid chairs, as if Rameses himself had just passed through the narrow, carpeted alleys, that intersected the hall in every direction, to feast his proud eyes upon the splendor of his costly treasures. There was no sign of dust or mould, but Rebecca's keen eye perceived, in a dish

filled with gold dust, the impression of a hand that had perhaps stirred it fifty years before.

Isaac, with sparkling eyes, pointed out gold writing materials and the silver model of a ship. Rebecca knelt in an ecstasy of delight before a dressing-table covered with gold combs, candle-sticks, and hair-pins set with gems. Suddenly, in the midst of this rapture of joy, the lantern flickered with a dying glimmer. Rebecca started up in terror to dip the wick deeper into the scarcely visible remnant of oil, and at least prevent its going out for the moment. Isaac stood as if paralyzed, gazing at the expiring flame. No escape? In the excess of their joy they had forgotten the scantness of the supply of oil for their lantern; must they now perish in the midst of their good-fortune, surrounded by the wealth from which they could draw at will? The wick was already drooping slowly towards one side, the flame was pouring out a dense smoke in token that it would soon go out, when the eyes of the trembling girl rested on one of the superb silver lamps glittering on the wall. With prompt resolution she darted up to it with her lantern and luckily touched the flame to the wick of the tall candelabra. Would it burn? Did a tiny drop of oil still linger in its metal body? For fifty long years it had stood untouched, it was impossible that the supply of oil should still be combustible — and yet it was! The wick caught fire; they were saved; the whole cavity of the lamp was filled with yellow oil, enough to moisten the wick for a whole twelvemonth. This discovery, joyously as

the brother and sister hailed it at the moment, aroused their anxiety, for it showed that from time to time the treasures were inspected. So caution was needful. In turning, Rebecca accidentally knocked over a small casket, which fell, pouring its glittering contents on the floor. Pearls and gems rolled in rich abundance over the carpet like dew-drops shaken from a bush by the morning breeze. Rebecca smilingly let the sparkling jewels slip through her fingers, while Isaac was filling his pockets with gold rings. The silver lamp now lighted the hall to the ceiling; it glittered in its own golden radiance, the flash of its gems, its pictures and carpets, urns and vessels, like a fairy-palace, like a sea of fire, like the spot where the sun sank into the flaming Nile. A long time passed in silence; the brother and sister, directed by their tastes and needs, were searching among the costly trinkets, their burning eyes wandered swiftly over the magnificent articles; now a jewel was chosen, another flung aside; they might have been compared to two pedestrians looking for flowers, had not the impatient eagerness, the trembling haste with which they pursued their occupation, rendered the simile inappropriate. Suddenly Rebecca uttered a low cry. Her brother hurried to her side and found her kneeling by the overturned casket, holding in her hands a papyrus roll, which she was eagerly reading. A secret drawer in the little ivory box had been broken.

“What is the matter?” he asked. “Was this papyrus hidden in the casket? Show it to me.”

“Is it possible?” he heard his sister whisper.

"Well? Let me know what frightens you so. You are pale. Your hands are trembling? This is not like *you*."

"She? The king's daughter?" the sister murmured.

"Who is the king's daughter? What king's daughter?"

"Here! Read this," cried Rebecca, in a trembling voice. "Read! If what is written in this roll is the truth, if we are not dreaming, if the name mentioned here belongs to some one who is still alive. . . Then, Isaac! What is to be done then? I don't know whether we ought to congratulate ourselves on the possession of this document, or go raving mad with rage and spite. Read! Read it, don't stand staring timidly at the roll."

"The characters are hieroglyphics, I don't understand them," replied Isaac.

"Listen then."

Rebecca began to read the following lines:

"I, Seti I., the Son of the Sun, beloved by gods and men, confess in this paper, which I shall keep in this casket, that during the last years of my reign I maintained unworthy relations with Rahel, the Jewess. She had ensnared my heart, I believed her loyal and true, but she devised with the high-priest Amni a conspiracy against my life, and I therefore sent her to expiate her crime in the Ethiopian gold-mines. From this connection was born a daughter Myrrah, whom I

warmly loved, but all trace of the child was lost after Rahel's death. Now, on my dying bed, where I am writing this document, a yearning for this daughter overpowers me and I beseech every one into whose hands it falls to try. . . ."

From this point the characters became entirely illegible; it was very evident that the dying monarch's hand had vainly endeavored to give his letters regularity and coherence, only the name was firmly signed at the bottom of the page.

Isaac had turned pale at hearing the word: Myrrah. After reading the document to the end, Rebecca looked enquiringly at him.

"Do you really believe. . . .?" stammered Isaac.

"What?" she asked harshly.

"What? Why, that Myrrah—you know what I mean."

"Is the king's daughter?" The Jewess laughed scornfully. "Everything agrees with the idea."

"What agrees?" enquired Isaac.

"Myrrah once told me the story of her life," his sister whispered, "from which it appears that the Rahel mentioned in the roll was Myrrah's mother and beloved by Seti I. The conspiracy and the gold mines also harmonize."

"Are you not mistaken?"

"No! Myrrah! A princess!" she continued enviously, "the idea is inconceivable. Poor, feeble Myrrah born under the canopy of the throne? No! I

should never have dreamed it, even if I had taken a sleeping potion that put the wildest fancies in the brain."

Rebecca eagerly searched the casket again and drew forth a small picture painted on ivory. She unwound the linen covering wrapped about the little square, scarcely the size of her hand, and held it up before her astonished brother.

"Has this face no likeness to Myrrah's?"

"By Heaven," cried Isaac, "the same brow and nose; I recognize, too, the peculiarly dreamy expression of the eyes."

Both sat in silence a few moments. It could no longer be doubted that Myrrah was the king's daughter, and the certainty filled the discoverers of the important document with rage and envy. As soon as this paper fell into the hands of the reigning king or any of his officers, Myrrah would be raised from the dust of her origin. The instant this papyrus saw the light of day, the girl who now searched the banks of the Nile for flowers, and twined wreaths in the sweat of her brow, who offered her wares all day long in the scorching sun at the corners of the streets, enduring insult, and scarcely satisfying her barest necessities, would be placed, as if by a magic spell, at the very summit of human grandeur. How lucky the child was! Fortune fell into her lap of its own accord.

"If we burn this roll, Isaac," Rebecca began in a low whisper, "who will ever suspect our Myrrah's mysterious kinship with royalty? No human being in

Egypt has any idea of the existence of this document, and the gods will be mute in their stone chairs. As Seti died very suddenly, this will, with the casket in which it was hidden, was probably brought to the treasure-house without having been read by any human eyes. We are the only persons who know of its existence; these words once destroyed, Myrrah's lofty origin is destroyed, too; she is what we are, and when Menes kisses her lips he will not know that he clasps in his arms a princess whose love is worth half an empire."

She was approaching the slender flame burning in the lamp to destroy the paper forever, but Isaac held her arm.

"Stop," he cried, "you cannot tell what use we may make of this document in the future. Who knows whether it may not render good service, should peril ever threaten us. We will conceal it better from the eyes of the world, then it will be virtually destroyed, but we can turn it to account at any time."

Rebecca thought this precaution wise and, after glancing at the papyrus again, concealed it in the folds of her robe.

"We may thank the lucky chance that threw this document into our hands," she said gaily. "Now my little Myrrah may spend her life in poverty while we riot in wealth."

"If she only had a suspicion of the royal blood that flows in her veins," giggled Isaac.

"Or if Menes had discovered the papyrus," replied

Rebecca. "Well, we'll guard against that. But the document will only supply fresh nourishment to my hate, I shall never cease to persecute this princess in rags. I owe her a grudge for being the child of a king ; she has treated me unfairly in owing her birth to the object of a monarch's love. It was a crime, and merits severe punishment."

She thought of Asso and the plan for surprising Myrrah with her lover. True, of late the widow had appeared strangely averse to this design, but she hoped to win her consent. Pondering over the ruin of her hated rival, she stared absently for several minutes at the bluish flame of the lamp, then hurriedly roused herself as if from an unpleasant dream, collected her varied stock of valuables, laughed scornfully as she tapped her breast where the royal will was concealed, and urged Isaac to leave the palace with her ; morning was already spreading its purple pinions over Memphis and they must reach home before daybreak.

Isaac speedily packed his treasures into a bundle, filled his clothes with gold and, after replenishing his lantern from the lamp in the treasure chamber, set out on the return. They noiselessly traversed the halls and passages and once more stood before the outer door. They knew they had closed it, but either this had not been properly done or, during their absence within, the lock had shut tighter, and would not open even under the united exertions of both. Neither shaking, pounding, nor pulling availed, the iron door remained immovable. What was to be done? An icy chill ran

through the limbs of both? Were they really prisoners? Shut up in this tomb? Living mummies? Isaac tore at the projecting stones till his nails bled and was on the point of bursting into loud wails of woe, had not Rebecca, summoning all her courage, forbidden him to indulge this weakness. She tried to jest about the annoying detention, endeavored to represent it as a freak of chance, but her pallor and trembling limbs belied her mirth. Isaac was now shaking the iron like a madman; the echo gave a mocking response.

"Jehovah! Jehovah!" he whined, letting his head sink upon the door, "help Thy children. Burst this wall, Thou alone can'st do it."

"Don't bother Jehovah about such trifles," Rebecca answered in a would-be jesting tone. "He has more important matters to look after. Go! Take the lantern, hurry back to the hall, and get some instrument with which the steel spring of the door, that I see glittering through this crack, can be pushed back. Go, Brother dear, and don't trouble yourself about the snoring Jehovah — we are our own Jehovahs!"

After some hesitation Isaac determined to return. Rebecca waited a long time in the darkness; minute after minute elapsed; she already regretted that she had not gone with him. The gloom surrounded her like a heavy coat of armor, anxiety almost stifled her. Still he did not come. Had he lost his way? Had anything unexpected occurred? She called his name into the darkness — at last a light glimmered in the distance. It came nearer and Isaac tottered forward, holding a

knife in his hand. This Rebecca now put in the key-hole, while Isaac braced himself against the door to push it back. At last, at last it moved, rolled slowly into the wall. They were released from the fetters of death and the skiff was rocking patiently at their feet. Hastily springing in they rowed towards home, for the yellow limestone mountains in the east were already glowing with a faint pink hue, and the moon was setting. The air blew cool, the brother and sister felt pleasantly chilled and, tenderly patting the bags filled with gold rings, were already imagining what they should buy first. They almost fell into a merry dispute upon this subject, for Rebecca wanted ornaments, while Isaac wished to purchase a handsome house, if possible, a villa on the Nile. Their imagination revelled in the most luxurious visions, and they never wearied of describing their future housekeeping; but when the first sunbeams shone gloriously on Memphis, steeping city, river, and mountains in the sun's ardent caress, the brother and sister silently kissed each other and thought of their father with grateful hearts.

The next morning loud shouts roused Rebecca from her sleep. She saw herself, magnificently dressed, seated on the Egyptian throne, and had just eaten a date whose stone she threw on a priest's bald head, when the vision was dispelled by the knocking and calling just mentioned. Greatly surprised, she hurried to the window and the first thing that gleamed before

her was the bald skull of a priest. "Is it the same one you just pelted with date-stones?" she asked herself, still half asleep. But, lo! The bald pate emerged from a magnificent litter, a slave covered it with a kerchief, and a stately man, wrapped in a leopard-skin and draped with folds of snowy linen, stood before Rebecca's astonished gaze. The first thought that darted through her startled brain was — we are discovered, some one watched our nocturnal trip! We are lost! Yet she could see no officers of the law; no one but peaceful servants was moving about the litter; one of them now opened a large parasol and held it over the man with the leopard-skin, while a smaller figure, also robed in white, stole to the priest's side. They seemed to be whispering together.

"Well, do you mean to open the door here," shouted a harsh voice outside; "is the high-priest, Psenophis, to be kept waiting?"

Rebecca opened it, and the majestic wearer of the leopard-skin entered. His crafty little eyes rolled eagerly as he saw the young Jewess, he seemed to be measuring her with his glances and whispered a few words to his companion, who answered with a laugh.

"What can I do for you, my noble lord?" said the Jewess humbly. "Ye gods, I am confused by the high honor of your visit."

Feigning a blush, she lowered her eyes as she spoke. She probably thought the new-comer admired her, for as he still remained silent, she seized her tabor and asked if he wanted a dance.

"Only a few attitudes," replied the priest pleasantly.

Rebecca threw aside her draperies, rose on tiptoe, stretched her arms upward, and bent boldly back until her hair swept the floor.

"That is sufficient," said the priest.

Then he turned to his companion and whispered with twinkling eyelids: "I think she'll please the king."

"Will you do me a favor, my child?" he asked the Jewess in kindly tones.

"Anything, my lord."

"Then be at home this evening as soon as darkness closes in," replied the prelate. "I ask no more. A slave will come to you, do whatever he requests."

"But"

"Ask no questions," said the priest positively. "Do what this slave requests. You have a supple, fish-like temperament, you will make your fortune. Your fortune! Do you hear?"

He rose, whispered to the amazed Jewess the word: "Asso," and walked swiftly away.

Rebecca now first suspected the matter in question and waited with the most ardent impatience for the approach of darkness. The sun had scarcely disappeared, when she decked herself with her richest ornaments, washed, bathed, and anointed herself, till she glittered like a polished mirror, and while thus engaged, often laughed so loudly that Isaac began to fear for her reason.

"I am so happy," she said, "I should like to embrace the whole world."

It had grown perfectly dark when a swarthy Ethiopian of elephantine size entered the room and asked for Rebecca. The Jewess mentioned the name: "Asso!" and the black giant instantly bowed humbly before her.

"Hail to you!" he said, unfolding a large shawl.
"Hail to you, Mistress."

"What is the use of this shawl?" asked Rebecca in surprise.

"Step on it," said the slave, grinning.

"Go into the next room, Isaac," Rebecca ordered.

Isaac withdrew, casting an enquiring glance behind him.

"Is the king still within the walls of Memphis?" Rebecca asked softly. But the Ethiopian distorted his features into a hideous grimace, pretended not to understand her question and, ere the girl could resist, wound the shawl around her.

"Keep still," said the black monster, laughing as he lightly lifted his human burden on his back, "keep still, don't stir, people musn't suppose I'm carrying a woman. This is to be a secret."

"I shall stifle," gasped Rebecca.

"Make yourself an air-hole," replied the slave, grinning complacently as he felt the dancer's beautiful limbs resting on him.

So they went out into the darkness. Rebecca's heart throbbed almost to bursting, "for," she said to herself, "I am going to my highest aim, it will perhaps depend solely on my own exertions whether I set my feet

upon the sacred steps of the throne!" She did not doubt for an instant that she was being borne straight to the king's palace, and already her wily brain was busied with plans for thrusting the monarch's wife, the austere Urmaa nofru-ra (a daughter of the Syrian king) from her husband's arms. Trembling with excitement, she clung to her bearer's neck. She now felt that he was carrying her up a staircase; whispering voices fell upon her ears, lights shone through the muffling shawl and, close by her side, she distinguished the voice of the priest who had called upon her. She closed her eyes, a tremor of expectation ran through her limbs. . . . the long-desired moment seemed to have come.

CHAPTER VI.

ENTRAPPED.

IN the park of the rich widow Asso stood a small temple-like structure, over whose roof rustled broad sycamore branches which permitted the silver moonbeams, resting on their leaves, to filter through and glide into the chinks, cornices, and windows of the dainty little dwelling. Around it grew a dense thicket which stirred strangely in spite of the perfect stillness. Sometimes a bright light shone among its gloomy boughs, one might almost have supposed that it had become alive and would presently hurry off. Some-

times a vivid torch-glare fell upon the wall of the building, then it was again completely veiled in darkness. At times the gravel grated under the weight of a step, anon every sound near the house was hushed. Light often flashed, too, from the windows of the temple, the frightened night-birds and moths circled around its painted roof and alighted on the cat-head of the little statue of Sechet, which stood on the right hand door-post, thrusting its black face into the darkness. Did little swarthy Sechet see the dark form that glided up to the door? The form put its ear close to the boards, then beckoned towards the thicket, where a white cloak appeared, and then retreated on tiptoe.

“What does that mean?” swarthy Sechet asked herself, but her marble arms rested firmly on her breast, she could not lift them to knock at the door; she could not raise her voice, as she perhaps would gladly have done, to give her protégés, the occupants of the temple, a warning. For, while the objects outside the little house were glimmering uncannily in the subdued light of the torches, two happy mortals within had no presentiment of the scene preparing for them. In the richly-furnished room, on a couch supported by golden feet, lay a pale, slender girl, and upon a richly-inlaid stool at her feet sat a young man, ever and anon pressing the girl's hands ardently to his lips. He held a pencil and was trying to sketch the fair maid's features on a roll of papyrus, gazing first at her face, and then at the sheet, where line followed line. A dainty lamp was burning on the round,

brightly-painted wooden table; the walls of the little room were painted and gilded; Assyrian tapestries draped the windows and gave the whole apartment an air of comfort. Pretty glass dishes glittered in the niches, and the green statue of Isis was enthroned before a small domestic altar. The young man paused in his work as the girl suddenly averted her face.

"Don't sketch me," she entreated; "I am not beautiful enough." Then, gently taking the pencil and papyrus from his hands, she gazed, blushing, at the portrait.

"It may resemble me," she said, "but I can't look at myself without abhorrence. Put it away."

"I should have been so glad to preserve your features," the youth answered tenderly.

His companion, smiling sadly, shook her head.

"It isn't right," she whispered.

"Why?"

"It seems like an injustice to the Creator to try to imitate Him in what He has done so much better," she replied with downcast brow. "It always makes me shudder when I see pictures. I can never look at your paintings in the temples without awe. I feel as if the artist had created beings who would fain live and yet cannot. I always pity the poor painted people, often so much that I could weep for them."

"Kind-hearted child!" cried the young man laughing.

"Yes, yes!" she continued in a gayer tone, "when I was a child I always prayed for the painted men in

your temples. Once I broke off a piece of my bread for them but they wouldn't take it, only stared at me so that I ran, trembling, away."

"How do you feel?" the youth now asked tenderly; "you still look pale, but you seem to be stronger."

As he spoke he offered her a goblet, and she sipped the red wine from its brim.

"I feel well," whispered the girl, who, as she now raised herself a little, could be easily recognized as Myrrah, "well and happy. Are you not kind to me? Have you not cared for me, with a mother's devotion, ever since the terrible hour you released me from the grasp of that horrible soldier? You have brought me food with your own hands, kept me, spite of the peril, concealed in this house, and taken infinite trouble to cheer my sorrowful heart."

"In which I hope I have succeeded?" asked Menes.

"Yes, I have now conquered the terror," replied Myrrah, though a tremor shook her beautiful limbs as she thought of the nocturnal adventure.

"Never again, Myrrah, will I remind you of that hideous incident," replied Menes. "We will forget it. For two days, though physically uninjured, you lay on these cushions, raving in the delirious visions of fever, so greatly had the event affected your delicate nerves."

"It was a terrible half hour," Myrrah murmured, "but you are right, we will not talk about it."

Yet, this event had proved the foundation of

Myrrah's happiness, for Menes' opportune aid filled the girl's mind with such ardent gratitude, that from that moment all the scruples vanished which formerly bade her avoid the youth; she loved him, she learned to understand his capacity for devotion and when, with awkward tenderness, he made himself her nurse, she believed she possessed in him a man whose peer could not be found on earth. How often, in spite of her weakness, she could not help smiling when he straightened her pillows or helped her to a sitting posture. How charming was the expression of feminine embarrassment on his manly features; how sternly he repressed any manifestation of his ardent love while he held her in his arms, and how greatly she honored him for this dignified self-mastery.

After a short silence, Menes urged the young girl to taste the antelope meat he had brought her, but Myrrah declined, saying in a low tone:

"Menes, it gives me pain to think of the hour of our parting, but it is close at hand. I can no longer accept a hospitality so hazardous to you; this temple has sheltered me long enough, consider how easily we might be betrayed. You told me yourself that you had seen suspicious figures gliding about the mound at night; perhaps some one in your mother's palace already suspects that all is not right here—and I am now strong enough to go to my work again."

Menes soothed her fears, assured her that his mother, deceived by his words, believed he came to this lonely temple to worship foreign gods; this bit of

innocent hypocrisy on his part would prevent all intrusion and leave them entirely undisturbed.

"Hush! Do you hear nothing?" Myrrah suddenly exclaimed.

"Where?"

"Outside the door."

"No."

"I thought I heard the gravel creak."

"It was the wind," replied Menes calmly.

"I can bear this no longer, Menes," said the timid Myrrah. "I shall go home to-morrow morning at the first dawn of sunrise. I will no longer impose this burden on you, plunge you into danger. I have endured this anxiety nearly a week for your sake . . . but hark! By Heaven! that was a human footstep."

"Impossible, dearest," replied Menes, laughing; "fear makes you hear noises that have no existence. My mother went to rest long ago, the whole palace is as deep in slumber as a tomb. Come, rest your pretty head against my cheek and let us dream of a blissful future. This temple, it is said, was formerly consecrated to love; our ancestors are reported to have offered here sacrifices to Astarte and I am ready to believe it, for I still feel the intoxicating breath of their clouds of incense prisoned among the hangings. It is also rumored that King Seti, when he once lodged in my father's house, secretly met in this temple a Jewess whom he loved!"

But, when Menes tried to talk of the future, Myrrah would not listen. Even the slightest thought of com-

ing days awakened dread. She felt that a marriage between herself and the young Egyptian was as impossible as the attempt to pass the pyramid of Cheops through one of her ear-rings.

"The Libyan desert," she cried in an excited, tremulous voice, "will become a sea ere your gods will grant us the happiness of a union."

Menes proposed various plans, and even spoke of flight. They would go to Ethiopia and hide themselves in the mines or seek an oasis in the wilderness and there, secluded from the world, live like a pair of birds. Myrrah, less enthusiastic than Menes, pointed out the impossibility of any scheme of escape.

"No," she said softly; "do not talk of such visions, our happiness consists in being permitted to be miserable together. That is the sole consolation fate will allow us, my dear friend."

She threw her arms around his neck, sobbing amid her tears: "Oh! why did matters go so far? Why did I follow you here, why did you save me from the crocodile's jaws when I wished to die? And yet! When I gaze into your eyes, feel the throbbing of your warm heart, realize how you love me! Ah—then I cannot help confessing that there is still one joy for me, that your love sweetens the bitterness of my fate, and lends my life a value. Yes for your sake I will live and suffer."

Menes, deeply moved, bent over the sorrowing girl. Words failed him, and he could only strive, by stroking, kissing, and caressing her, to show that he was ready

to share all the grief he had brought upon her, that his heart cherished no other thought than that of devoting himself to her service with the same enthusiasm a young priest consecrates to his god. Myrrah at last sank back upon her couch, her anguish passed into a mood of gentle melancholy, but she would still speak of nothing but the woe his love for a wretched Jewess caused him and heap invective upon her own head. Menes was on the point of telling her that she was insulting him by saying he had fixed his heart on an unworthy object (as she called herself) when a noise disturbed the stillness of the room, and startled him as well as Myrrah.

"Didn't I tell you so," whispered the trembling girl. "We are watched. Oh! Jehovah, protect us."

"Hush!" murmured Menes, "let us listen."

The bolt of the door was gently pushed, but it rattled.

"It is as I said," faltered the girl in a despairing tone, "we are lost."

Menes' thoughts were beginning to be confused by this discovery, he stared at the door as if he expected a ghost to appear — the harshly-uttered word: "Open!" shouted into the room, first restored life to the rigid form. He rushed to the window and, after some difficulty, succeeded in opening it; black, gliding forms, the red glare of torches, and the murmur of many voices showed him that there was no escape in this direction. Instruments were now applied to the lock, he distinctly recognized his mother's imperious voice, a voice so

stern, so cutting, that he involuntarily glanced at poor Myrrah, muffled in her shawls, for it seemed as if the unloving tone might pierce the girl's tender heart. What a scene was impending! He could have wept with rage, though he seemed to himself like an unruly child which has deserved punishment and now stands before its master's lash. He had thrown the window curtain over Myrrah, but scarcely had he realized what a pitiable part he must play as soon as the door opened, than a feeling of eager defiance rose within his heart and, with a resolute jerk, he released Myrrah from the concealing folds.

"No," he cried, "she shall not see me tremble before her, like a criminal who would fain conceal his guilt."

In decisive moments the young man, usually so timid, could assume an extraordinary, almost exaggerated firmness. He gazed with sullen scorn at the door, which was trembling under the blows of his enemy's axes.

"Have you any idea who betrayed us?" he asked Myrrah.

But the girl, clinging convulsively to her lover's arm, could no longer speak. The door was breaking, it could not resist a moment longer. Menes, with throbbing temples, sat watching it yield; he felt as if he could annihilate all his persecutors by the lightning flashing from his eyes.

"Let them come, my child," he said. "Whom should I fear? Surely not my mother? If I must

dread her, she, too, shall learn to fear me, for her son is ready to answer for what he has done, and will joyfully sacrifice his mother's love if he can win yours in exchange. That's right. Strike on with your axes. I am glad to profit by this opportunity of showing my mother the man her son really is and how far her authority over my life extends."

He had scarcely uttered the words, when the door fell crashing into the room. Rebecca instantly appeared in the opening, pointed with a crafty look at the young pair, and vanished again in the darkness. Menes had intentionally turned his back to the door, and sat as calmly and quietly as if he took no heed of the incident and it concerned some one else. A hand laid heavily on his shoulder made him lift his head. He rose slowly.

"You? My dear mother?" he said courteously, "take a chair, sit down."

With these words he placed a chair beside Asso, who was staring speechlessly with her glassy eyes, now at Menes, then at the sobbing Myrrah.

"Pray sit down," the young Egyptian repeated with forced calmness, while his mother, utterly bewildered by her son's grave, calm bearing, was vainly striving to express in words the wrath, the fury seething in her heart.

"Are you surprised, dear mother? You should not be! I owe you an explanation, and will now be perfectly frank. So listen! You must first learn who the young girl you see here with me, is, and under what circumstances I took her under my protection."

After Menes, apparently with perfect composure, had sent away several servants who had pressed into the door to witness the scene, he quietly began his story. He laid special stress upon Myrrah's having once saved his life, and plainly intimated that he loved her; he did not even apologize for his secrecy, but showed that he did not particularly care how his mother had interpreted it. This was the first time that Menes had ever showed he had a will of his own in his mother's presence; never had he spoken with such assurance; never had he so firmly defended his rights. This made a marked impression on the lady. She felt a touch of the superiority of a man's intellect over a woman's, for a moment she was actually intimidated by the youth's resolute bearing.

"You have matured to manhood in a very short time," she said in a tone of perplexity.

"You are right," he replied, "love has strengthened my mind. I see the world from a wider standpoint and know how far the rights of each individual extend."

"You apparently wish to deny me the right of saying anything about this affair of yours — is it so?"

"It depends upon what rights you wish to assert," Menes coldly replied.

"And if I censure your conduct?"

"Who will prevent your doing so?" replied her son smiling, "but who will prevent me from not heeding your upbraiding?"

Asso darted a furious glance at the youth; she felt

that she was comparatively helpless against him ; but her wrath was all the more fiercely concentrated on the Jewess. Perhaps her rage might not have burst forth so speedily, had not Myrrah, who could not endure to see the mother and son at variance, started up to throw herself at the haughty woman's feet.

"Forgive me," sobbed the terrified girl, "I am a Jewess. Pardon us, noble lady. If you are Menes' mother, turn your anger upon me, not on his guiltless head."

These words restored the widow's composure ; the wrath that had gathered in her heart made her entirely forget her son's presence. She hurled an angry look at Myrrah, flung off the arms of the pleading girl, who was trying to clasp her knees, and burst into convulsive laughter.

"So Rebecca was right ? This is the goddess at whose feet he lies in the temple ? This is the serpent that beguiles him," she gasped, "that seeks to withhold him from doing honor to his mother by investing himself with rank and power ? This is she who blasts all my plans with the breath of her accursed mouth."

Then, drawing a long sigh, she gazed at the kneeling girl with a scornful glance and thrust her back with her foot, while Menes, with pale face and flashing eyes, watched the scene, unable as yet to take any active part in it.

"Dear little one, how did you succeed in luring the bird into your net ?" shrieked the frantic woman. "Did you play the prude ? Did you weep before him

daily? Or did your boldness charm him? Has he promised to make you his wife?"

"Noble lady, have patience with me, I will tell you all," sobbed Myrrah.

"I ask whether he has promised to make you his wife?"

"Lady — I have. . . ."

"I want an answer."

"Oh, help me, Menes — she will kill me. . . ."

"Has he promised that?"

"He has — but. . . ."

"He has? Aha? He really has? Very fine," and Asso laughed aloud without heeding the presence of the man of whom she spoke. "Did the enthusiast, the boy, go so far? I really don't know whether to laugh at this affair or call you both seriously to account! I almost believe I am in the presence of two lunatics, who ought to be treated with indulgence."

Menes, pressing his clenched hand upon his heart, was forcing himself to be calm.

"He promised to wed me, noble lady," Myrrah now said, in a somewhat firmer tone, "but never, never will I consent to such a marriage. I know that I cannot become his wife. My origin, all the circumstances forbid it. My desires never mounted so high as to hope that he would be my husband, but if you ask me whether I have loved him, I must answer: Yes! So far I will tell the truth. And, noble lady, you will find no disgrace to your name in my love for him. Farewell! Farewell, Menes! I shall leave this place and avoid

you both forever. Menes, you have my warmest thanks for your self-sacrificing friendship, the beautiful but impossible plan you have cherished. I will go, and with me, I trust, all cause of dissension will vanish from your home. Let no one follow me."

She wrapped her draperies around her with tremulous haste and turned to quit the room, but ere she reached the door, burst into convulsive sobs, and gasping: "All is over..." sank slowly to the floor with her head resting against one of the door-posts.

Until now Menes had controlled himself, but when he saw his beloved Myrrah so overwhelmed by grief, he turned angrily to his mother. "Look at your work, you pitiless woman," he cried. "Rise, my dear child. She shall not harm you while I am near. Rise, I will not suffer her to insult you, though she is my mother."

Asso forced a smile, which was strikingly like a grin of rage.

"Are you beginning to uphold her?" she cried. "Of course, one rebel will help another. I must remind you that I am the mistress of this house and have at my disposal the means to carry out my will."

"If you value your son's love as much as your dog's," replied Menes, "you will not use these means, but try to come to an understanding with him quietly."

"Come to an understanding with a madman? Your mind already seems so confused that I can not say another word to you. Besides, if you appeal to my maternal love, recognize it in my endeavor to separate you from this girl."

"You do not understand either of us," replied Menes.

"And do you really intend to make this Jewess your wife?"

"That is my firm resolve."

Asso, looking her son steadily in the eye, reflected a moment.

"Do not be foolish, Menes," she said at last, in a tone whose sudden gentleness startled him. Don't allow yourself to be deluded by a skilful female-juggler. I know her tears and high-sounding phrases; I know such women, whose fine speeches you take for pure gold, when they are only base lead. My dear son, I am sorry, but I must open your eyes or, following a delusive phantom, you will plunge into the gulf of ruin. For the sake of all the gods, guard your vivid imagination against the charms of such women; they will drag you to destruction, for while you believe you are in an oasis, you will suddenly find yourself standing alone in the scorching desert. Be not like the Nile, don't lavish your gifts without distinction upon every smiling face, but test and choose with care."

"And suppose I have tested?" asked Menes.

He gazed questioningly into his mother's eyes; the gentle tone she had assumed won him. He felt that he was yielding; for the open-hearted youth never thought that she could dissemble.

"Obey me, my son, and let this girl go," Asso continued, "do not fix your noble heart on one who is worthless."

"Mother," he replied, "you seem to think I have become the victim of base deception."

"That is exactly what I believe."

"I thank you for your careful guardianship of my path in life, but I must entreat you not to condemn before you have proved. I swear to you that no drop of ignoble blood flows in the veins of this Jewish maiden. I have had an opportunity to look into her heart. You are mistaken."

Asso smiled slyly. Then she asked:

"Will you allow me to subject this girl to a trifling test, which will speedily convert you?"

Without waiting for the astonished youth's reply, she took from her breast a costly gem, well worth a small country estate, and held it before Myrrah's eyes.

"I offer you this valuable jewel, Jewess," she said, "if you will frankly tell my son the truth. Fully and frankly — do you understand? Courtesy in this case would be hypocrisy."

"What am I to tell him?" asked the wondering girl.

"Say to him: 'you were a credulous simpleton whom I deluded. I do not love you!'—tell him so and this gem, which will forever relieve you from poverty, is yours."

"Take heed, Menes," she added, "the gloss will vanish now."

But Myrrah was silent. An expression of the deepest indignation flitted over her face, and she looked steadily at the lady.

"Aha!" cried Asso, laughing, "now we're pretending to be magnanimous. You think you can humbug us about your character by feigning generosity. Well, we'll try other means! Listen, you shall receive a hundred lashes at once, if you don't instantly confess that you have deceived my son to extort money from him. So confess!"

Asso clapped her hands, and two black slaves appeared at the door.

"Drag this girl up from the floor," ordered the widow, "and flog her. Now notice, Menes, how quickly she'll take a different tone."

A pause followed. The grinning slaves were arranging the thongs of their whips, and Menes stood staring at his mother in speechless amazement.

"Confess," cried Asso imperiously, "I will keep my promise. You see that you are delivered into my hands. A frank acknowledgment can save you."

Menes mechanically advanced a step and stammered a few words. His mother smiled soothingly at him and again commanded the trembling Myrrah to confess.

"Jehovah is my witness that base purposes are foreign to my nature," the latter murmured — "scourge me."

"Seize her, slaves," said Asso, perfectly unmoved, "she will confess what I desire at the first blow. Nothing but physical pain can bring such women to reason."

The slaves had already raised their whips over the

head of the unfortunate girl, who meekly bowed her lovely neck. Menes could control himself no longer. A violent push hurled the foremost man on the floor, then the youth resolutely advanced so close to Asso that she involuntarily recoiled a step.

"Mother," he gasped in a hollow tone, "I conjure you, by the mighty Ra, not to try my patience farther. I am your son and have always obeyed you, but here duty and a sense of human rights command me to stop your cruelty. If you desire to commit such an outrage from affection for me, I must assure you that I will gladly dispense with your love, a love of which I have heard very little mention until this moment. Neither god nor man shall dare to lay hands on this innocent child and, if you do not instantly recall your inhuman command, I shall forget in whose presence I stand."

These resolute words brought to the mother's cheeks a pallor born either of wrath or fear. After a short hesitation she motioned to the slaves to withdraw, and directly after forced her features to wear a smile.

"You know, my son," she began timidly, "that I have no other desire in my heart than to see you happy and powerful. Ascribe it to this wish if, for a moment, I have allowed myself to act unfairly."

Menes breathed more freely.

"I am glad you judge yourself correctly," he replied.

Asso's features revealed her struggle to assume a more amiable expression. She seemed to wish to represent what had just occurred as a mere jest, and

intimated that she would not have allowed the trial imposed on the girl to proceed as far as actual bodily pain.

Yet sometimes the smiling eyes flashed with a look of secret rage, that belied all her fine words and smooth gestures.

"It is possible that I may be mistaken, my child," the portly lady said at last, laying her hand on her son's arm with the most winning tenderness. "Perhaps, this girl's character is not so bad as I suspected, nay, perhaps she possesses all the virtues you perceive in her — I will gladly admit it. But you must let me retain a shade of doubt until, by watching her for several months, my heart is also convinced of the good qualities yours has discovered. I hope these doubts will soon be dispelled; they certainly exist now, but if you can confidently rely upon the character of the object of your love, trust her to me, I will receive her among my attendants. Does that suit your wishes?"

While speaking she smiled sweetly at the youth, who did not for a moment doubt the sincerity of her advice. What should he fear? Ought he not to thank the gods if Myrrah obtained a good home. And if she stood the test, was it not possible that Asso might regard their relation with more friendly eyes? At last, touched by the girl's lovable nature, would she not bless the union without further delay? "Are you considering the matter, my son?" asked the widow.

"No," he replied, "I will give my consent. This noble resolution shows me your maternal heart, your

generous kindness. I could desire nothing more ardently than that you should learn the beauties of Myrrah's character — in order to change your opinion as quickly as possible."

"If she proves to be what you think her," Asso whispered, "we'll see what more can be done. I will be a mother to her, and your happiness shall find no obstacle in me, but"

Menes, on hearing these words, had clasped his mother's hand.

"Yes," she went on, "I will no longer oppose your union, but — while I am testing your little betrothed bride I must — in justice to her — put your love to the proof."

"That is only right and fair," said Menes. "Speak, dear mother! I will shrink from no test, submit to any trial you may impose."

"When you have not seen each other for a long time, you will clearly understand your own feelings," Assó continued. "Time is the best touchstone of love; you must part in order, if you remain faithful to each other, to be all the more tenderly united. While I keep Myrrah in my house, as if she were my daughter, I shall require you, Menes, to follow your vocation. Posts of honor at the king's court are already beckoning to you, and only yesterday I received a letter from the lord high chamberlain, in which he promises to procure you an audience with Rameses. It is time for you to tread the steps that will lead you to your dead

father's position; you can no longer wander idly in Memphis, surely you must feel this yourself."

After uttering these words the widow gazed impatiently at her son, whose eyes were fixed on the ground. She was evidently intensely anxious about his answer to this demand, for she changed color several times and hastily wiped the perspiration from her brow. As Menes still remained silent, her expression became more and more sullen, and not until he suddenly started and looked her steadily in the face, did she again essay her peculiar smile.

"Well, Menes," she said, "I should like to hear your opinion. Are you so weak that you cannot part from Myrrah, though you know she will be in good hands? See, the girl you love has more courage than you."

Myrrah had risen from the floor where she had cowered until now; her features expressed the most intense anxiety; she, too, was waiting in trembling expectation for her Menes' answer. The youth now turned to her.

"What shall I do, Myrrah?" he asked. "Give me your advice."

"What!" cried Asso. "Does a man seek the counsel of an inexperienced child? Have you no resolutions of your own? Do you depend upon the will of others?"

"I ask you once more, Myrrah," said Menes, "shall I go? Forsake you? You shake your dear head sorrowfully. Yet I must. I cannot do my

mother an injustice, she means well and I shall render myself the greatest service by obeying her wishes."

He approached the wan girl.

"You are strong enough to bear patiently the season of trial we must both endure," he said embracing her, "come, go to the lady who has promised to promote your happiness and mine, give her your hand. She has made an unfortunate impression on you by her hasty action, but she can also be kind and gentle, as you see. Look, she is smiling pleasantly at you, she will make you her daughter; trust her whom I must esteem and honor. She is not what she first appeared to you."

Asso took the reluctant girl's hand, and said with gentle dignity :

"My child, whether I learn to love you will depend entirely on your own conduct. There shall be no fault on my part, I will try to become accustomed to your presence. Be cheerful, happy days await you."

As Myrrah still stood motionless, with downcast eyes, the widow addressed herself to Menes.

"You see," she said, "my wish to win this heart; it is no fault of mine if the girl rejects my affection."

"Grant her a few days rest and reflection," replied Menes, "I am sure that she will love you. Her soul is still shaken by the terror of the surprise; when the storm has subsided she will more clearly perceive what kindness she is to receive from you. Leave her to my consolation."

Asso turned to go, her eyes sparkling like those of a

victorious general. She had gained her desire of snatching her son from his inactive life and launching him into a more glorious career.

Menes considered himself fortunate that a scene which had commenced so seriously had taken a turn so bright and hopeful; the tempest which had roared so ominously was now passing away in gentle mists; he had—as he said to himself—vanquished his mother's heart; not even the faintest cloud of suspicion shadowed the horizon of his happiness. The future glittered before his gaze like the Egyptian landscape after the inundation of the Nile; the short separation from his betrothed bride only served as spice to his bliss and, since the parting was inevitable, how fortunate he was in knowing Myrrah to be at ease in the arms of wealth.

Myrrah, too, who had at first tearfully resisted the suggestion to become the attendant of such a woman, finally yielded to her lover's gentle arguments and told him that she would do what he desired, but that she had taken an invincible aversion to Asso. She conjured him not to believe all his mother said, advised him to test, to watch her; but Menes almost indignantly repelled the girl's doubt of Asso's sincerity. Reproving Myrrah for her distrust, he answered her that, though his mother was easily angered, her character was extremely honorable, nay, unimpeachable."

"I have warned you," replied Myrrah. "I can do no more. But, even if it should bring misery upon me, I will obey your commands and try to please your

mother. She shall never have reason to complain of me."

The whole party then went to the palace, Asso walking at her son's side and talking pleasantly, Myrrah silent, and Rebecca singing gaily as she danced along before the trio.

From that day Menes had no reason to complain of his mother. Though she had his meetings with Myrrah watched and frequently interrupted them, she treated her son's betrothed bride with the respect that was her due. Menes did not lack gratitude; it might have been jestingly said that he transformed himself into his mother's lover, so gallantly did he carry her sunshade and offer her the various dishes at the table. Asso entered into the joke, assumed the coquettish airs of a much admired lady of the court, and tapped her adorer's shoulder with her palm-leaf fan as in her younger days. The confiding youth did not understand how to interpret the lines of thought often visible on his mother's brow, his knowledge of human nature did not extend far enough to pierce beneath the smooth affability of this woman of the world, and hear the throbbing of the intriguer's heart, so he lived on, childishly unconscious of evil, in the delusion that his mother was yielding to his authority, while the matter was exactly the reverse. Nothing more had been said about his departure, and he seemed to avoid speaking of it himself.

One day, when he was walking through the lower rooms of the house to look for the fragments of some old papyrus rolls, his eyes fell upon two travelling-boxes filled to the brim with magnificent clothes. He took no farther notice of them, but after vainly searching for the rolls, went to his mother's room and asked gaily if she intended to take a journey. Asso seized the opportunity to enlarge upon the advantages travel bestowed on an inexperienced person, described in vivid hues a trip up the Nile, portrayed the magnificence of Thebes, and conjured before her son's eyes the palace of the Pharaohs. "A young man who had never left home," she said, "was like a sword which had never been drawn out of the sheath, both, in a certain sense, were despicable." When Menes, who probably felt his mother's aim, cast a hasty glance through the window as though he, too, experienced the impulse to wander afar, natural to all young men, the widow moved more boldly towards her mark.

"Would you like to travel, would you like to travel?" she asked, watching him excitedly.

Menes sighed. Should he travel? It was so difficult for him to come to a decision. His imagination, inflamed by his mother's description, was already revelling in distant regions. He saw himself in the desert, surrounded by whirling clouds of sand, on the Nile, gliding past superb monuments; a consuming curiosity to unveil the mysteries of Meroë seized upon him, the strange, joyous excitement of the delight of travel filled his breast. To this longing even love was

forced to yield ; it would be so sweet, when far away, to think of the loved one, to know that on returning home he would be received with open arms. Asso understood how to profit cleverly by the advantage she had gained, and when Myrrah, with downcast eyes, entered the room, she instantly embraced her, kissed her, patted her cheeks, in short took every way of showing Menes in what kind hands he would leave the girl during his absence.

Yet the youth could not resolve to quit his mother's house ; he deferred his departure from day to day ; it seemed as if his good angel was whispering in his ears warnings, over whose mysteries he could not find sufficient time to ponder. How often he said to himself : " To-morrow morning will not see you in Memphis !" But one timid glance from Myrrah's gazelle eyes always made his determination waver.

Asso probably had her own reasons for not urging her son's departure, she even avoided laying too much stress upon the need of despatch. Menes was as obliging a child as any mother could desire. He treated Asso very affectionately, was always attentive to her, even helped her dress, and aided Myrrah in the domestic occupations she was gradually taught, for she had already entered upon the duties of her position. The relations between mother and son seemed wholly changed, jests and laughter took the place of the sullen silence that had previously reigned. Menes showed

his gratitude in a thousand trifles, nay he even condescended to learn the hated game of draughts, which his mother usually played with the nomarch every evening, and soon acquired such skill that he almost always won the victory, which led Asso to remark that he had a positive talent for generalship. He actually accustomed himself to the fragrance of certain flowers Asso particularly liked, though it almost made him ill. He had formerly suspected that his mother only preferred the perfume because the late King Seti had pronounced it the best of all. Even the chair which the monarch had occupied when he honored Asso's house with his presence, and which had since been treasured like a sacred relic, was no longer the object of Menes' jests. For more than the fiftieth time he patiently listened to the description of the sovereign's visit, knowing that Asso considered that period the most brilliant one of her whole life, nay he always repressed his incipient smile when she related, not without pride, that the Son of the Sun had never wearied of looking at her foot — a very pretty one in those days — and had ordered his sculptor to model it in gold. Of the sovereign's mysterious love-affair she never spoke.

Myrrah's life, compared with her former one, was like a blossoming rose-bush. She sat at the same table with Menes and Asso, which naturally aroused the violent envy of the other servants, was not required to do much work, and had a pleasant room, yet she still remained silent and reserved, Menes' tenderness could scarcely evoke a melancholy smile. If he spoke

to her about her manner, she assumed a more cheerful air for a short time, but her laugh sounded so forced, her tokens of affection were so grave and formal that Menes one day looked at her in perplexity, believing that he had lost her love. But when he told her so, she burst into a flood of tears and threw herself at his feet, exclaiming :

“Menes, do not forget me when you go to the royal palace in Thebes.”

With these words she hurried away. It was evident that she had been imagining the temptations to which the young Egyptian would be exposed at the court of Thebes, and her loving heart trembled when she compared herself with the rich daughters of the aristocratic royal officials. Menes, in alarm, followed her, but she would make no reply to his assurances; her only answer was tears. A few days later a letter arrived from the Lord High Chamberlain, summoning Menes to Thebes and promising him a kind reception at the royal palace. When Asso read the lines aloud to her son, he trembled violently. He was not one of those who are prone to see the future in a rosy light; anxious forebodings arose in his mind, and a certain pleasant dread took possession of him, a feeling akin to that experienced by the swimmer who is about to plunge his warm limbs into the cold waters of a stream. Myrrah's future was assured — his own gave him a mysterious chill, like the entrance to a rock-tomb.

CHAPTER VII.

FORCE AND FRAUD.

MENES had left Memphis. The leave-taking had been intentionally shortened by Asso, so that ere the young Egyptian or Myrrah fairly realized the parting, fields and woods already separated them. The widow had sent Myrrah to the most remote corner of her country estate to gather, in the Nile canal, papyrus-stalks, in which she dealt. Meanwhile Menes was hurried into a skiff that was to convey him to the harbor, where a larger boat awaited him. He probably perceived that it would be better to lighten the farewell in this way, for he scarcely asked for Myrrah, nor indeed did he utter three consecutive words during the whole day fixed for his departure. His compressed lips and glowing eyes revealed the agitation of his soul, but his manner most carefully concealed his mood. When, standing in the skiff, his eyes, heavy with unshed tears, wandered over the shore in search of something, his lips moved as if he were about to speak; but, probably feeling that even a word at that moment would destroy his manly composure, he raised his right hand in menace and gazed intently at his mother, with a look whose anguish expressed everything, far more than his tongue could tell. Asso whispered consoling

assurances and promised to guard his Myrrah faithfully, the girl should be as well off in her house as if she were in the regions of the blessed.

When the news of her lover's departure was brought to Myrrah, she gasped for breath and shut herself up in her own room. From the day that robbed her of Menes she performed her domestic duties even more silently than before, never mingling in the conversation of the other servants, to whose ranks she now belonged. She moved noiselessly amid the bustle of the great, wealthy household, solitary and aloof from all who surrounded her. Nothing aroused her interest; it seemed as if a heavy cloud rested on her, forbidding any connection with the outer world. Her eyes were tearless, but the expression of her features told of wakeful nights. She treated her mistress with timid submission, but avoided her also as much as lay in her power. Blame and praise were received with the same indifference, it was evident that she had within her own soul a world that would not permit her to come in contact with the external one. The only living creature with whom she at last associated, or who awakened any sympathy, was the two-year-old child of a Syrian slave who performed the task of washing the dishes. To this child, as soon as her work was over, she devoted herself, her grief-worn soul clung to its innocent heart; she vaguely felt that, since she had lost Menes, this little one was the only creature she could trust; it was not yet capable of dissembling; its love was sincere; here she found what she sought — unfeigned

affection, comfort, and recreation. When little Netkro began to find Myrrah's company tiresome and refused to go with the unhappy girl to her room, the latter was again obliged to content herself with her own society, until the child's father, touched by the poor Jewess' melancholy state, devised a remedy. He gave Myrrah a little wooden boat he had carved, which soon tempted Netkro back to her friend's room; but this toy, too, soon lost its power of attraction; after a few weeks Myrrah was obliged to take the cat for her sole companion.

Of course there was no lack of scoffing from the other servants. When she was invited to play ball with the maids and slipped away without answering, all sorts of teasing speeches pursued her.

"She has lost her tongue," said the steward, laughing, when he gave her an order and she silently executed it.

"She's an owl, and doesn't wake up until night," the head oarsman said to his underlings, with a sly smile, when she brought cushions to the boat to prepare it for an excursion and passed the faces looking eagerly at her without vouchsafing them a single glance.

"She thinks herself better than we are, she's proud," said Hassura, the chief waiting-woman, when the poor Jewess did not hear that she was to carry the morning drink and cakes to her mistress' couch.

So long as Menes was in the house, Asso had treated the girl with flattering kindness, called her "my child," and patted her cheeks. From the moment of

his departure a striking change took place in the proud woman's manner; she scarcely troubled herself about her charge, nay, it often seemed as if she encouraged the servants' scoffs. A letter sent by Menes to his mother from Thebes, in which he most earnestly commended Myrrah to her care, exerted no influence upon the widow. Myrrah perceived this with torturing anxiety; though she had prepared herself for evil days, what she was now compelled to endure surpassed all her expectations. Yet, even in the hour of her deepest misery, she hurled no reproaches on her lover's head—he had intended her best good. She was forced to suffer because his credulous heart had been deceived in the woman he was obliged to reverence as his mother. Her anxiety increased when she could not help noticing several other unpleasant incidents. Once she saw Asso, before going to rest, smilingly whisper a few words to the servant who was handing her the evening drink, upon which the latter, an insolent young Egyptian, darted an ardent glance at her. Myrrah hastily retired to her own room and, as she closed the door, heard the fellow's disagreeable laugh.

Another time the steward roughly reproved her in her mistress' presence, without any interference from the latter. These reproaches, where she had formerly heard only pleasant words, so startled her that she crept about all day long as if under the influence of an evil dream. A few days after, when she was a little awkward in undressing Asso, one of the maids stuck a gold pin into her arm, and the widow pretended not to

notice the rudeness. The poor, forsaken child's distrust increased, as she daily saw more distinct tokens that Asso not only did not intend to keep the promise she had given her son about his betrothed bride, but that she was studiously acting in direct opposition to it. One day Myrrah dropped a dish of dates she was passing to her mistress; the handle remaining in her grasp, while the dish fell. The separation occurred so suddenly that Myrrah instantly suspected the handle had been intentionally broken and then lightly fastened on again to throw the blame for the accident upon her.

"I am innocent, Mistress, indeed I am!" she stammered, "the handle was scarcely fastened to the dish."

"Yes, yes," sneered the overseer Mut, "innocent! I suppose the air is to blame for breaking the valuable article? Or an evil spirit perched on the brim, when you took hold of it?"

At the same time the angry man dealt her a blow on the shoulders with the palm of his hand. Myrrah, pale and silent, turned towards Asso; the sorrowful expression of her eyes seemed to say she had not deserved so harsh a punishment; but the latter turned away and hastily nodded to the overseer with an encouraging glance. Mut, laughing, gave her a second blow, intentionally displacing the kerchief that veiled her bosom. The girl, at first speechless with indignation, burst into tears.

"Don't pretend to be so prudish," she heard her mistress say.

"If your son knew," sobbed the humiliated girl,

"how I have been treated here during the few weeks since his departure — oh!" She could say no more, her voice was stifled by a flood of tears.

"Well? Well? What then? What would happen in case he knew? Do you really believe he still thinks of you?" answered her mistress harshly. "Oh, you credulous creature! Don't be foolish, child. You must be trained, polished. You ought to be grateful for the punishment I allowed you to receive."

"Oh, why did I let myself be deluded into staying here?" murmured Myrrah, forcing back her tears, while Mut grinned insolently at her.

Myrrah secretly sent a messenger to Thebes with a letter to Menes, in which she related her sufferings and besought him to return; she did not know what she might do in her despair if no help came. The missive contained such earnest entreaties, such tender complaints that, unless Menes was wholly changed, it could not help making a deep impression on his mind. The deserted girl felt this, fixed all her hopes upon it — and she received not the least word in reply. Day after day, week after week, she waited — in vain. Had her letter been intercepted? Had her lover's been suppressed? Or — but no, that was impossible! Menes could not forget so quickly; surely he had answered her. Then, at the end of a few weeks, Asso's manner suddenly changed. When she passed Myrrah she paused, gazed at her compassionately or kindly, and patted her hand, exclaiming: "Poor thing! A sad experience!" These strange proceedings were so fre-

quently repeated that the girl began to wonder what her patroness meant, some motive, hitherto concealed from her, must surely underlie this singular conduct. Could Menes be ill? Yet, why did not the widow say so frankly?"

One evening Asso summoned Myrrah to her couch. When she entered the lady unfolded a papyrus-roll, pushed the shade back from the lamp, and in a gentle tone, asked:

"Dear child, do you still love my son?"

Myrrah looked up with a bewildered expression.

"Certainly, Mistress," was her timid answer.

"Indeed! Indeed! You good little thing. If he were only as loyal as you! Oh, my son, my fickle son!"

"He is true and faithful," whispered the girl, a bright smile flitting over her emaciated face at the thought of her lover.

"True and faithful? Poor child! No! Believe him neither," said Asso, sighing as she unrolled the papyrus.

"Who dares slander him?" replied Myrrah, almost defiantly. "I know I can rely upon his faith, no one on earth understands him so thoroughly as I. Nothing shall lower him in my eyes."

"I am informed in this letter," Asso quietly continued in a pitying tone, "that he — just think of it, my Menes — is seeking the hand of Hesepta, the daughter of the commander-in-chief. Pleasant as such

an alliance would be to me, I cannot help regretting that he is so inconstant in his affections. It throws an ugly light upon his nature. How quickly he has forgotten you, my good child! Yes, I can't help condemning that, it isn't fair. Come, give me your hand, I'll try to make amends for the wrong he has done you."

Myrrah shook her head, but did not say a word. The widow continued to speak of her son's fickleness without noticing that a large tear gradually stole from beneath the girl's lashes.

At last, bursting into sobs, she interrupted the noble lady's torrent of eloquence with the hasty words: "I don't believe it."

Asso, smiling compassionately, clapped her hands and a slave instantly appeared, whom she ordered to call the messenger who had brought the letter from Thebes. The man came in, still in his travelling-dress, and so positively asserted the truth of the news contained in the letter that Myrrah's heart was torn by torturing doubts. She tottered and was forced to sit down.

"I have a plan," said Asso, smiling mysteriously as she placed her lips close to Myrrah's ear, "listen, my child! Suppose we should take vengeance on the faithless fellow! He deserves punishment."

"What? How do you mean?" asked the perplexed girl.

"Why," continued the older woman, "suppose he should learn that you had followed his example and,

without consulting him or asking his consent, entered the state of matrimony”

But, ere she had finished her sentence, Myrrah interrupted her by a gesture of the most intense repugnance and hastily left the room.

Much as the young girl doubted the truth of this news, the sudden communication pierced her inmost heart. In her modesty she felt only too deeply her inferiority to the rich daughter of the great general in every charm that could bind the love of men. Doubt of her Menes' faith had once been cast into her soul and ever and anon, while working or resting, it appeared like a troubled dream or a gloomy reverie, clearly as she perceived that Asso was pursuing no other purpose than to sadden her and drive her from her son's heart. Was not this proposal of marriage a distinct proof of how eagerly Asso was trying to effect a separation between the lovers? But Myrrah shrank from the thought of belonging to another, as she would have recoiled from death itself, and even if, forgetful of her, Menes should spend his life with a stranger, — was it necessary that because he had become faithless she must be disloyal to him? In imagination she beheld Menes' at the king's court, surrounded by magnificence, admiring and admired by fair women, honored, flattered — but no feeling of jealousy arose with these fancies in her breast, scarcely did a sense of pain venture to stir within, she wished him to have these triumphs, she rejoiced in his splendor. In her hours of unhappiness it seemed certain that he had forgotten

her; then she reproached herself for having doubted him even a single instant. These reflections had one good result; she forgot to notice that she was treated more and more contemptuously in the widow's house. It was no longer deemed necessary to provide her with food at table, and she often suffered hunger for days. Now that her thoughts were tossed to and fro on the waves of this doubt, she felt the neglect but dimly, as though she were shrouded in a veil; the whole world seemed wrapped in mist; even coarse insults lost their sting; she could smile, without knowing what she was doing, when a maid-servant heaped taunts upon her. Absorbed by this stupor of grief, she did not even notice that a dark-bearded stranger had been visiting the house for several days. He often spent hours in conversation with the widow, entered timidly, nay mysteriously, cast approving glances at Myrrah when he met her in the corridors, and was gradually treated by Asso with a sort of friendliness which even bordered on respect. The servants whispered together about the strange appearance of this swarthy Jew; reports of his intentions circulated among them; his name was associated with Myrrah. At last some of these rumors pierced the girl's seclusion. She heard broken sentences about the mysterious Jew, which though at first unheeded afterwards disturbed her; congratulations were offered her, nay the oarsmen suddenly treated her with a certain degree of respect, and the overseer of the household offered her his protection.

“Lucky creature!” said the maid who had stuck

the pin into Myrrah's arm a few weeks before, "lucky creature, the gods evidently watch over you. But when you have attained your fortune, remember me! I was always your best, most faithful friend."

With these words she kissed the girl's cheek.

"What good fortune am I to have?" asked Myrrah in surprise.

"What good fortune? Oh, you rogue," laughed the flatterer, "as if you hadn't guessed it long ago. Oh, you sweet little rogue, so you feign ignorance?"

"I really don't know what you are talking about," replied Myrrah, whose kind heart had led her to forgive the spiteful maid long before.

"Ha, ha," cried the latter, laughing, "how well you play modesty. Well, keep on, you'll surely please him by it, you enviable girl."

As she spoke, she glided away, leaving Myrrah in the most anxious suspense. What plots were being secretly formed against her? What fresh misfortune was already hovering with outspread wings over her head? What hands had undermined the path she was following? She felt as if a net were being drawn closer and closer around her; she perceived that a plan was being devised, not to destroy her utterly, but to render her forever harmless. More and more threatening became the tokens of the approaching storm, more and more anxious the heart of the hapless Jewess. At last the mystery that had been hovering on bat-like wings about the house was to be revealed, at last she was to perceive the gulf along whose edge she had wandered,

to discover in whose hands her trusting, unsuspecting Menes had left her.

One evening, wearied by her day's toil, Myrrah sat alone in her little room; the sun was just setting beyond a palm-grove as if vanishing behind a curtain to bathe in the flowing yellow waters of the Nile, whose waves were glowing with eager yearning to receive the mighty Râ, the ruler of the universe. Myrrah had witnessed from her window the majestic spectacle, then she arranged her wretched cushionless couch, sat down upon it, and eat a half-mouldy date, the only supper that had been given her.

The last rays of the day-star fell upon the bare floor of the room and for a few moments lent the rough, dreary clay walls the golden splendor of a hall in a royal palace. Then the purple radiance gradually took a sorrowful farewell of the sky, and twilight stole timidly into the tiny chamber. The poor child sat gazing almost stupidly, at least stolidly, into vacancy. Her many sleepless nights, her constant anxiety, the torture of uncertainty about her fate, asserted their power; physical exhaustion was now added to mental torpor. What course would her life take? What fate was impending? Why did she hear nothing from Menes? She confessed to herself with terror that she was no longer able to feel anything distinctly; complete indifference had taken possession of her; her fancies played at will with her heart.

Myrrah sat thus for a long time, as if her thoughts were far away; it had already grown quite dark when

the door was gently opened. As soon as she noticed it, she started up in terror to shut it again, but a soft, warm object wound around her neck and shoulders. The girl uttered a low cry; in her bewilderment she fancied that a man had had the insolence to embrace her and was already indignantly thrusting the arm away, when this supposed arm began a low: "Meow!" It was the cat named: "Beautiful Light!" that nestled tenderly against the young Jewess, from whom it had secretly received many a dainty morsel, for which it was now trying to express its gratitude. Myrrah, in joyful surprise, caressed the animal, thinking: "it is the only creature in this house that loves and means well by me."

The cat's tender caresses touched the poor girl's heart as they had never done before; she felt what true, faithful companions the gods had given men in the animals, and thought it less strange that the Egyptians embalmed them. Through the window echoed from afar the notes of a song carolled by some returning reaper; the melancholy, monotonous melody floated by like the wind wailing through the sedges; the music of a harp blended with them. Under the influence of these consoling sounds, the lonely girl raised her head; her bosom swelled, her eyes beamed with a gentle light and, as she chanced to see outside the starry orbs gazing down upon her from the lofty heavens, a sort of enthusiasm stole over her, a rapture of mingled pain and pleasure; a smile, that might almost have been called sublime, hovered around her beautiful pale lips.

"No, he loves me, he loves me; how dare I doubt him," cried a voice in her soul. "I must be constant; ere long he will return to release me. I will patiently endure any torture, in order to be worthy to be called his! He loves me! I feel it! Those notes, those stars tell me so."

The music had died away, but the forsaken girl's joyous elation still lingered. Her mind was cheerful and at ease; she even found a certain pleasure in being unhappy; her whole nature, everything she did and thought seemed ennobled by the pain of renunciation; she walked up and down her little room several times with a light, free step, like a queen.

But this happiness was doomed to be of no long duration. She had just sat down again, resting her head dreamily against the bedstead and letting her mind wander to her distant lover, when she heard heavy steps at the door and a black slave entered.

"Follow me to our mistress, she wants to speak to you."

Myrrah roused herself from her reverie and, while arranging her simple dress, answered: "I am coming."

"Let that go," said the slave.

"Let what go?"

"Here is a better dress for you," the blackamoor continued, producing a bundle he had hitherto concealed, "take yours off."

"Why? I don't like this one."

"Why? How do I know?" retorted the slave

angrily. "You must, that's enough. It makes no difference whether you like the dress or not."

Myrrah unfolded the robe. It was made of one of the costly materials worn by aristocratic Egyptian women, with whom they were extremely popular. The texture was so remarkably delicate that the wearer might almost as well have appeared without it, for it permitted the limbs to gleam through as if they were in the crystal water of a bath tub. Myrrah's delicacy rebelled against wearing this garment, and she pushed it resolutely aside. When she said that she could not put the robe on, the slave retired, but instantly returned with the message that she would be compelled to do so if she refused. Reluctantly yielding to the command, she undressed, and when the transparent folds floated around the shining fairness of her limbs, the Ethiopian reëntered.

"Don't put on airs," he said, looking approvingly at the young girl, who turned away in confusion. "You are on the point of making your fortune. The mistress did wisely in choosing this dress, that you might appear to the best advantage. Follow me, and take courage. It will be better for you to enter boldly; your beauty gives you a right to hold your head high, little lotus-flower."

Myrrah, trembling violently, followed the man through the dark corridors. A vague suspicion darted like a frightened deer through her soul; she felt that the decisive hour of her destiny had arrived. The servants who saw her pass stopped, smiled, or loudly ad-

mired her loveliness, while her companion listened with a very important face. At last the slave paused before a door. Loud talking echoed from within the room; Myrrah's heart throbbed almost to bursting when at her entrance the conversation ceased for a moment.

She found herself in Asso's carpeted sleeping-room. On a large table, which was covered with rolls of papyrus, stood some exquisitely-carved writing utensils. Asso was, smilingly toying with a reed-pen, while behind her chair stood a young girl very elaborately dressed and opposite sat a man, eagerly reading one of the rolls. The metal lamp on the table shed a dull, reddish light on his countenance as he bent his hooked nose over the papyrus.

When Myrrah had collected her senses, she recognized — to her intense astonishment — in the black-bearded, sallow reader, Isaac, and in the beauty who, bedecked with gold coins and overloaded with ornaments, stood behind her mistress' chair, Rebecca. At the same time she recalled to memory the figure that had so often pressed into her presence within the last few days, though until then she had paid no heed — this figure she now knew had been Isaac. — For what purpose were the brother and sister here? They cast significant glances at her, then looked at each other with mysterious smiles, and finally gazed meaningly at her again. What brought the pair here at this particular moment? What was the object of these festive preparations? Some formal agreement seemed to have been made, some important decision formed which

might perhaps have the most grievous effect upon the life of the forsaken girl. The whole conduct of the assembled group indicated some impending act that had already been maturely considered and its pros and cons eagerly discussed.

Myrrah's brain whirled, she scarcely saw or heard what was passing around her, but remained standing expectantly at the door.

A slight, slender-limbed Egyptian, whom the girl had not yet noticed, his figure being concealed by the widow's massive proportions, now rose from the lady's side and, with a smile, bent his shaven head over her, saying in the genial voice of an intimate friend:

"Farewell, farewell, dearest lady; the witnesses and documents required for this young girl's marriage to this man are all arranged, there is no further obstacle in the way and nothing is needed except your signature, Asso."

Had Myrrah understood correctly? Were they speaking of her? Her ears buzzed, and she was compelled to cling to one of the door-posts.

"Oh, God of my Fathers, what is impending over me!" cried a voice in her panting breast, "what infamy is to be committed here? No, it is impossible! I have deceived myself, I am dreaming! It is all a hideous vision."

Asso had risen.

"I thank you for your assistance, Metro, you have done me a great favor."

"I was very glad to do it," replied the Nomarch of

Memphis, smiling. "Yet you might have considered that a Jewess is outside of the pale of the law, and that you can treat your slave very much as you choose; so long as you don't deprive her of life, we magistrates don't interfere with your arrangements."

The heart of the tortured girl throbbed more and more anxiously, the speaker's words roared in her ears like a cataract.

"Are you going already, Metro?" asked Asso with feigned disappointment, "do you mean to spoil my pleasant evening? You know how I value your conversation, it is so entertaining, so stimulating; like oil of lilies on a fair maiden's bosom it shines and bestows light and fragrance."

"You understand the art of flattery as well as an Assyrian courtier," smiled Metro, adjusting his robe in elegant folds. "If I can talk well in your society the reason is easily explained, for who is indifferent to beauty? With everybody else I'm as clumsy as a hippopotamus 'but, when your eye rests on me, my words flow like the clouds of incense streaming from the priests' censers."

"Stay a little longer."

"Impossible, dearest lady. Business, business," replied the official hurriedly. "I can't possibly stay, much as I enjoy your company. In the first place: the expense of the new water-works is to be estimated, the plans for them must be examined, the workmen paid! Then there's the king's statue to be set up again under my oversight — you know it lies damaged

at the foot of the pyramid. It is to be a monument like that of King Moeris on Lake Moeris! Then there are troops to be sent to Thebes — state secrets — sh...!"

He laid his finger importantly on his thin lips.

"Is it true," whispered Asso, stealing to the nomarch's side, as she heard the word "state secrets": "is it true that the queen, Urmaa-nofru-râ, has plotted with her stepson against the king. There are rumors of a conspiracy against his life — Psenophis himself, the high-priest, is said"

At this name Rebecca raised her head to listen, but the nomarch hastily interrupted the lady.

"At this point, you know, our friendship ends," he said with assumed gayety. "I know nothing, can venture to say nothing. Take women for confidantes? Rather choose the wind, the waves of the Nile, or the birds twittering among the rushes. Good-night. May Isis guard your sleep until the morning."

With these words, casting an approving glance at Myrrah, he glided nimbly through the door.

Isaac laid the paper he had been holding upon the table.

"Everything is ready," he said with cringing civility, "and I will venture to remind the Lady Asso that Myrrah has entered."

"Entered? Ah, I didn't see her," replied Asso turning. "Very well! Then I will inform her of her good-fortune. What do you think of it, Rebecca?"

The words were accompanied by a significant

glance at Rebecca, who giggled softly, as if to say: "I admire you, Mistress."

"Come nearer, my dear child," continued Asso, turning to Myrrah, who was standing modestly in a dark corner, "come, give me your hand. Are you not astonished — yes, I see it in your eyes — to see us sitting here in solemn state? Listen, and learn from what you will now hear the protecting care of your maternal friend. Yes, indeed! I have taken your welfare very much to heart, have spent many a sleepless night in pondering over the thought of how I could shape your life most happily. I hope you will never forget this."

She stroked Myrrah's dark hair with her warm, flabby hand, exclaiming: .

"Isn't she beautiful, Isaac? What a figure! What slender, dainty limbs! Yes, my son had good taste."

Isaac's sparkling eyes wandered over the form of the young girl who, though she did not look up, felt a sensation of loathing. An unaccountable dread stifled her, it seemed as if the last moment of her life had come, or Menes was being slain before her eyes.

"Come, my dear child," the lady graciously continued, "this worthy man, whom you know, has concluded by my advice to say openly. . . ."

She cleared her throat in embarrassment, the words would not cross her lips, at last she turned, blushing, to Rebecca.

"You tell her," she whispered.

Rebecca gazed at her former friend with a half-pitying, half-malicious smile. She was probably thinking of the document found in the treasure-house, for she whispered to her brother: "Look at the princess!" and then added aloud in a jesting tone:

"Isaac has determined, with Asso's permission, or rather by her wish, to become your husband."

A pause ensued, all eyes were fixed enquiringly upon Myrrah.

"Just see how she looks," Rebecca said laughingly to her brother, who was unsuccessfully trying to assume a pleasant expression.

"Well, why don't you embrace me?" said Asso, "why don't you call me your dear mother? Don't shrink away and cast such horrified glances at honest Isaac. I have given you to him for his wife, and he is satisfied. I have bought a house for him in the western part of Memphis on the street leading to the pyramids, where you can spend a happy married life—speak! Who has more reason to be grateful than you?"

Asso had really given the Jew a beautiful mansion, as much to persuade him to accept Myrrah's hand as to make some compensation to the betrothed bride of her deceived son. By this present she believed she had entirely atoned for her injustice. Isaac, on his part, found the gift very desirable, because he could now openly display riches stolen from the king's treasures without fearing the astonishment of the world, whose suspicions would surely have been aroused if a poor

Hebrew, without any visible cause, had suddenly transformed himself into a rich man. But now, under the cloak of business, the golden waves might be comfortably drawn from the treasure-house.

The impression made upon Myrrah by the revelation of this cruel design can scarcely be described. At first she heard the words without grasping their meaning; but when they were repeated, only her death-like pallor, the fixed stare of her eyes, and the convulsive quivering of her livid lips betrayed the secret torture caused by the thought of being torn from Menes in this base, malignant way, and forced to become Isaac's wife.

So this was the mystery that had so long hovered around her? Without the knowledge of her lover, who had no suspicion of his mother's atrocious conduct or the desolate condition of his promised bride, she was to be compelled to wed a stranger? And that stranger was the hated Isaac? The enormity of this inhuman deed crushed her like a falling house; only one idea forced its way among the rest: You have lost him for life.

Then a voice in her heart cried: "Oh, why does he know nothing of your torture?" It seemed as though her cry must reach him across mountain and river, and even in distant Thebes he must surely have a presentiment of the misery to which she was on the point of being condemned. If he were sleeping, some dream must tell him what she was suffering, if he were sitting gaily at the banquet some inexplicable feeling of sor-

row, suddenly seizing upon him, must announce the evil plotted against her. She fancied that some mysterious chord ran from her heart to his, and he could not help instantly appearing in the room. But the illusion, born of despair, vanished into its own sorrowful emptiness before the voice of the woman who had resolved upon this deed of violence.

"Well, how does my plan please you?" asked the lady graciously, "am I not a kind mistress? Oh! you should see the house that will now be your own property, its rooms, its tables, its cushions!"

"She still seems a little bewildered," said Isaac apologetically, "we must have patience with her, noble lady, she will collect her thoughts and then give us her answer; I see that she likes your plan. Don't you, my dear girl?"

Rebecca probably felt an emotion akin to pity, as Myrrah raised her large, troubled eyes beseechingly to her face. She gave the girl, who was on the point of fainting, a glass of water and pushed a chair near her. After Myrrah had struggled a long time to realize this unexpected horror and regain a clear perception of her situation, after she had forcibly shaken off the paralyzing stupor that threatened to wreck her reason, the first idea that forced itself upon her attention was the necessity of defending herself. The consciousness that, if she did not make a vigorous resistance, her future would be one of endless misery, gradually filled her with a sort of nervous courage. Trembling violently, she rose from her seat, gazed proudly around the room, and

cast a glance at the widow, which made Asso blush. She would dare the utmost peril, even if it caused her destruction.

"Mistress," she gasped in breathless haste, "does your son know of this?"

"You need not concern yourself about that," replied the lady as carelessly as possible.

"Pardon me, it *must* concern me," replied Myrrah in a firm voice, "I have promised to be his wife; he has a right to me; neither you nor I can venture to take such a step without his permission. He alone must decide whether I shall become Isaac's bride."

"I decide that, girl," replied Asso sternly, "neither he, nor you. And I assure you that, so long as I breathe, my son will never be your husband. You may take your oath upon it. And, to render a union with him forever impossible — you must and shall become Isaac's wife. It is my will. Be reasonable, don't force me to adopt violent means, take the hand a man of your own religion kindly offers. Thousands in your situation would consider themselves fortunate. You will rise from the position of a poor servant to a rich married woman — what more do you want?"

"Then you will deceive, betray your own son!" Myrrah now exclaimed in so loud a tone that the reed-pen dropped from Isaac's hand. "You will compel me to become faithless to him? Beware! If you do not fear me, do not tremble before my reproaches, dread your gods, whom you call just, and who will behold your injustice with indignation. Beware of the hour when

your heart will lie in the scales before Osiris, the judge in the realms of the dead; do you see the languet of the scales waver? Do you see the forty-two judges of the dead pierce you with their keen eyes? The animal sacred to Thoth, the god with the horrible dog-head, touches the tongue of the scales; your heart rises, rises, it will be found too light; and when you protest that you have not committed forty-two sins — do you believe your judges will not suspect your falsehood? Do you not know how accurately the account of the deeds of men is kept in the nether world?"

Asso tried to shake off the horror inspired by Myrrah's description of the final judgment.

"The judges of the dead," she said repellently, "will reckon the act among my good deeds, not my evil ones."

"Consider what you are doing," cried Myrrah with increasing excitement, "what anguish you will cause Menes if, on returning, he finds me by another's side? Can you, a woman, so wrong your son? Do you wish to perhaps become his murderess? Then accomplish this deed! Do you wish him to become your murderer? Then carry out your design — you heartless, unnatural mother!"

"I love my son," cried Asso, as if wounded by the words. "I love him; that is the very reason I do what I am doing. I am well aware that it will cost him a painful struggle to see you in another's possession, but he will soon recognize his mother's love as the impulse of this violent measure, will perceive that she was com-

pelled to pursue this course, and gratefully kiss the hand which, by a quick, cruel, but salutary operation, freed him from the disease that threatened to embitter his whole life. Leave the task of consoling my son to me, think of your own welfare; do you wish to be a drag upon the chariot of his fortune, the stone weight that pulls him down from the height he is destined to attain?"

"Do not commit this deed, noble Lady?" moaned the poor girl, stretching her hands beseechingly towards her mistress. "Do not, I implore you. I will resign your son, never see him more. Give me permission to leave Memphis. I will beg my bread barefoot from city to city, wander through the deserts till I reach Syria; your son shall never hear of me, I will be dead to him; he shall be mine only in memory — but spare me the terrible fate of being this man's wife. Perhaps you do mean kindly — here your kindness is cruelty — give me poison rather than such a husband."

"Little goose," said the lady laughing, "recognize your good-fortune, think of it quietly."

"Don't do it," sobbed the wretched girl, without hearing her enemy's words, "oh, don't do it! I can say no more."

"Give me the pen, I will sign," said Asso, "my resolution is immovable."

"You are making me utterly miserable," cried Myrrah, clasping her hands, "don't do it — let me go. . . ."

"Go?" replied the widow, "that in some roundabout way you may reach Thebes?"

"Do not distrust me — I will not go to Thebes, I am more truthful than you. . . ."

"I know the value of such assurances. People make them in a moment of desperation, swear to live strictly according to their maxims, but when the pressure of necessity lessens or opportunity comes, all these protestations fade away. Suppose I should let you go. For four months you might journey towards the north, the fifth would see you on the way to Thebes."

"You are wrong, noble Lady! Don't do it! Have mercy! Be a woman, not a hyena! Do not chain me to a man I can never love, it is more cruel than death by the most lingering torture."

"Silence. This is the only means of gaining the certainty that a union between you and my son is no longer possible; only by your marriage can I force Menes to give you up, consider you dead; not by your absence, your separation from him, which would soon be one no longer. I dare not depart from my resolve, keenly as I feel it may be called a harsh one. Give me the pen, Isaac, I'll sign the document. I do so with reluctance — but — I can find no better expedient, however long I may reflect."

Isaac dipped the pen into the pigment to hand it to the widow. Myrrah watched the lady's movements in the utmost suspense. When the pen touched the roll she could no longer curb her desperation; forgetting all self-control, all submission, she threw herself on the

floor before her mistress, forcing back from the papyrus, with the strength of madness, the hand that held the pen, and shrieking: "Aid me, Omnipotent Ruler of Heaven!"

"Release me from this lunatic," gasped Asso.

"Listen to reason, Myrrah," groaned Isaac, gazing at the prostrate figure with secret delight.

"Don't write," moaned the pitiable victim of force and fraud. "Oh, Menes, why do you remain absent! Hasten! Fly hither! Oh, if you knew—cannot my cries reach you? Do not your gods warn you of the wrong committed against you? All is silent, not even a breeze is stirring, all is silent and unfeeling—she is writing—it is over—nothing comes to my aid—I must bear the inevitable. I must bear it!"

"Bear!" she moaned again from the depths of her tortured heart, then her head sank helplessly on the table, while Isaac, murmuring consolations, gently tried to raise her.

While Myrrah was uttering these wild words, Rebecca with an icy smile loosed the girl's hands, which had clenched convulsively around the arm of the startled Asso, and thus gave the widow time and opportunity to hastily sign her name at the bottom of the roll. The aristocratic dame was panting for breath when, after the signature was finished, she flung the pen upon the table and her eyes fell on the prostrate figure. Even to her the scene was painful, she probably thought of the responsibility she had assumed at this moment, the consequences this arbitrary act might

entail. After a short pause to rest, she clapped her hands and two black slaves appeared.

"Is the litter ready?" she asked in an unsteady voice.

"Yes, Mistress," replied one of the men.

"Very well. Isaac, I leave you to take your wife—for these strokes of the pen have made her yours—for your house. These slaves can assist you in the work, if there should be any difficulty about it. The litter is ready. I can remain here no longer."

Asso uttered these words very hurriedly and then swiftly withdrew, in order not to be compelled to witness the heartrending scene that must follow. Isaac now tried to make the young girl understand, but his efforts were futile, Deaf alike to commands or entreaties, she clung desperately to the table. The husband had no alternative except to wrench away his wife's hold, as one would tear up a firmly-rooted ivy, a task in which Rebecca aided him. The slaves, at a sign from the Jew, were just going to lend their assistance, when a singular change took place in Myrrah, who had hitherto seemed almost unconscious. A sudden thought must have entered her mind, for in a short time she controlled herself and rose, while an expression of triumph illumined her pallid features. Without speaking, she intimated by a gesture of the hand that it would not be necessary to force her to enter the litter, and as she now turned to the astonished Isaac her eyes sparkled as if with some distant vision of hope.

"And you wish to become my husband?" she said, with a shade of disdain in her calmness.

"Yes," replied the Jew humbly, "if you will permit. . . ."

"You do not fear me?" she continued.

"Fear? Why should I? I love you."

"Very well! I will go with you. . . ." She paused abruptly with a strange smile.

Myrrah moved forward in advance of the others to enter the litter. When she had nearly reached the door, she apologized for having forgotten the kerchief for her head and said she must return at once. A slave offered to bring it, but she refused; she wanted to go herself, and darted swiftly down the corridor to the room they had just left. As soon as she entered, she cast an excited look around the apartment.

"I saw it glitter yonder," the young girl murmured, "yes, there it is." She hurriedly approached a shelf in the corner on which, among all sorts of ornaments, chains, bracelets, etc., lay a costly dagger, like an old sinner among a group of innocent children. She quickly clutched the flashing steel.

"You shall be my best friend, little shining murderer," she said with a fierce smile, patting the blade as she concealed it under the kerchief folded over her bosom. "Jehovah placed you here and made my eyes fall upon you in my direst need; you gleamed upon my sight like a ray from Heaven. Help me."

She turned towards the door, but shrank back trem-

bling, for Isaac was standing there. She had not noticed that he had followed her.

"What are you looking for?" she cried in terror.

"You," he replied.

"I am here, let us go."

"Have you found your kerchief?" he asked tenderly.

"You see that I have," she answered, watching him intently.

Both walked side by side to the litter, Myrrah uncertain whether his suspicion was aroused, the Jew scarcely able to control the raptures of his love.

"You must dress more warmly," he whispered softly, wrapping his cloak around her, "the night air is cold."

When the girl had taken her place in the litter, he bent over her once more.

"Forgive me, Myrrah," he whispered trembling, "forgive me. . . ."

"For what?"

"For — for loving you," escaped his lips in an awkward, embarrassed murmur.

The house Asso had given to Isaac stood in the western part of the city in the midst of a garden. The Jew had prudently allowed the girl several days rest, to recover from the unexpected blow and collect her thoughts. He had treated her in the same way that one tries to tame an unruly parrot, namely, left her to her-

self, had scarcely seen her once a day and had said very little to her. This evening he intended, for the first time, to assert his conjugal rights. Myrrah had hitherto angrily resented any allusion to them; but now, at the expiration of a week, the husband hoped for a more favorable reception. Could any woman's heart long resist the fond devotion of an ardent husband? The absent lover must gradually yield to the present one, the silent image of the distant Menes must pale before the fervor of the husband who was close at hand, and when once under the influence of real caresses, how could the imaginary ones of a distant suitor still exert any power of attraction over her heart? Everything depended on choosing a favorable hour, and this Isaac believed he had found in a warm, dreamy evening, which rested like a lover's lips upon the valley of the Nile. He dressed himself in his handsomest garments and, with a throbbing heart, stepped out on the flat roof of his dwelling. Myrrah was sitting in one corner on a pile of luxurious cushions; the breeze lightly stirred the deep-red Assyrian curtains which enclosed the roof, lending it the aspect of a pleasant room, through whose ceiling the slanting moonbeams peered inquisitively. The young Jewess sat with averted eyes. Isaac advanced close to her side, putting his lamp upon the little table on which his wife's arm was resting. What an arm! How softly its fair, rounded outlines curved towards her head. He touched it and she turned her face, over which the lamp cast a flickering, mysterious light. Still Isaac hesitated.

"How happy we might be together," he began at last in an unsteady voice.

"Happy?" she murmured with a shudder, "happy?"

"If you would forget this Menes. Wealth and distinction have fallen to my lot, nothing is wanting to complete my happiness except your love. Why should you fix your heart upon this man, who is not of your own race? Oh, Myrrah, if you could only love me with one-half the fervor you bestowed upon him — I would be a faithful, tender husband to you, a husband such as perhaps you might not find in Menes who, for aught you know, may be mocking the heart you have given him."

Both were silent. The night-breeze swayed the hangings, a moth fluttered around the lamp, profound silence reigned everywhere; far away in the darkness a few bright spots showed the position of Memphis, whose inhabitants were enjoying the coolness and quiet on the flat roofs of their houses. Isaac passed his arm around Myrrah's neck, but she drew back shuddering.

"Isaac, I beseech you, tell me the truth," she said imploringly. "Has Menes forgotten me? You know, oh! do not deceive me. Asso has told you."

"Why do you question me about Menes?" he answered sullenly.

"Was that message false? Does he still love me? Isaac, by all that is sacred to you — speak!"

"I didn't come here to talk of Menes," the Jew replied harshly. "I wish the jackals were gnawing his

bones, the sands of the desert were drinking his blood. You know what I ask, delay no longer, my patience is exhausted."

"Call your sister," gasped the trembling girl.

"My sister?"

"She protected me yesterday, she will persuade you now — Jehovah, what a look! Isaac! Kill me! kill me, and I will thank you."

"Little fool, kill you? My sister has gone away," Isaac answered still more roughly.

"Gone! Then I have no one to aid me!" cried the forsaken girl. "Alas! of late she has been kind to me. Where has she gone?"

"Don't turn our conversation to other subjects," said the Jew hastily, "you tried that plan yesterday, I see through it now. I will not be your husband only in name."

Myrrah still hesitated to oppose the pleader with all the dignity of her pride, she thought she might soften his heart by entreaties.

"Have pity, dear Isaac," she murmured, clasping his hand. "Violence made you my husband, but violence can never gain my love — at the utmost you can but render me your slave and I hope you are too noble to degrade me so far. If Menes returns to find me pure as he left me, — how he will reward, how he will thank you. Let me be your sister, and do you fill a brother's place; you shall find in me a devoted, infinitely grateful sister, a creature who will worship you, admire your self-conquest, and truly love you — because you

renounce! If you demand more than I am willing to give, I shall be forced to hate you, but if you show yourself a noble nature I will be yours — in spirit."

Isaac gazed silently at the floor. Had his sister stood beside him, his habit of obeying the signs of the sharp-sighted dancer would have led him to desist from persecuting Myrrah, and he would have yielded his rights. But, to-night, feeling himself the sole possessor of the house, nothing restrained him; the girl's entreaties only seemed to add fuel to the flames. His mental conflict was soon decided. Seizing Myrrah's arm with a tiger's clutch, he clasped her struggling form and was on the point of pressing a glowing kiss upon her lips, when he felt a cold object touch his breast, which made him utter a cry and stagger back.

"Come no nearer!" he heard Myrrah exclaim. She was confronting him, panting for breath, her figure drawn up to its full height, her eyes, glowing with an almost fierce lustre, fixed on vacancy, while her slender hand grasped a dagger. The young girl was absolutely motionless save for the throbbing of her breast; her curls had escaped from the pearl fillet that confined them and were falling on her neck. As Isaac gazed at her, standing in this attitude, he could no longer doubt the truth of the document which declared Myrrah to be the daughter of a king.

"I am capable of anything," she gasped, struggling with her grief and anger, "I am capable of anything, if you venture to touch me. I once had a gentle nature, but it is mine no longer, I will meet violence with vio-

lence. Either you or I! If I cannot kill you, you shall see me bleeding at your feet. Choose which of us shall quit the world!"

She drew back, pressing the point of the dagger to her white breast. Her master gazed speechlessly at her — he could not forbid the girl to kill herself, here he was powerless.

"I belong to Menes," Myrrah then continued with passionate firmness, "and to no one else. If he cannot embrace me, no other man shall. These lips, this heart are his, and I will defend them against every one. He is my god, and no one shall profane my love."

The excited words, the bold defiance of her whole bearing, exerted so crushing an influence over Isaac that he glanced timidly around him and left the roof. Probably he was enraged with himself for his cowardice, yet what could he have done except yield? He would not cause her death for any price, and he felt that he should have done so if he had persisted; her threat was something more than empty words. If he could have seen the unhappy girl sink cowering on the floor after his departure, and heard her suppressed sighs of terror, his lost resolution would probably have returned. But he curbed his rage and gave orders that several of his slaves should watch the house day and night. Thus he was at least sure of having made Myrrah's escape impossible, and as a last resource he could always employ force; this time he would content himself with informing his patroness Asso of Myrrah's obstinacy and seek this resolute lady's counsel.

On the evening of the following day Isaac visited the treasure-house. Nothing had occurred to disturb him, often as he entered the mysterious place, but this time he noticed that several articles of value, whose places he knew, had been moved and others were taken away. Could a second thief, like himself, be stealing from the royal riches? That was not probable. When he looked more closely, he perceived to his unutterable terror that small rods, from which hung labels bearing numbers, had been placed before the different chests. Could royal officials have inspected the treasures and noticed the removal of valuables? A burning thrill ran through his limbs at the bare supposition! He only removed the lowest layer of the rings and gems, arranging the upper ones precisely as they were originally, and was careful not to disturb even the tiniest atom of dust that might have betrayed him. By these means he thought he had concealed his presence.

CHAPTER VIII

A TISSUE OF TREACHERY.

It was early morning. A young man with a dreamy expression was pacing to and fro in the halls of the royal palace of Thebes, whose pillars stand upon a stone platform parallel with the Nile. He wore a gay kerchief on his head and the cloth knotted around

his loins was richly adorned ; but the rest of the body was nude, revealing smooth, slender limbs. It was evident that he had little or nothing to do, for with hands clasped behind his back, he wandered from room to room, colonnade to colonnade, feasting his eyes on the splendor that surrounded him. Yet a feeling of anxiety sometimes seemed to steal over him ; he often paused, his chin slowly sank upon his finely-rounded chest, his eyes grew dim, or gazed sorrowfully into vacancy. The forest of columns through which he wandered, majestically supported the vast ceiling ; a melancholy, yellowish-violet light, which strangely excited the imagination, streamed with subdued radiance through the capitals from above, or lent the shadows in the more distant halls a deep purple hue. The atmosphere one breathed seemed steeped in a roseate color ; a faint perfume suggested that costly incense was sometimes burned here. The pillars stretched in endless lines. The wearied eye at times rested in delight on richly-carpeted rooms, from whose ceilings heavy curtains flowed in mysterious folds, at others fairly shrank from gazing down long, endless corridors, which led into larger halls, opening in their turn into vast apartments, until at last, halls, walls, pillars and doors seemed to vanish in infinite distance. A mysterious, oppressive grandeur everywhere pervaded these gigantic rooms, in whose empty spaces a man felt as desolate as if he were alone on the wide sea. One scarcely ventured to breathe. Everything seemed to demand reverence. Deep silence reigned ; no courtier's gliding

step was heard, no soldier's clanking weapons, no slave-girl's rustling robe. Menes — for he was the young man strolling through the room — Menes passed his hand across his brow.

“Where have I wandered?” he murmured, and the words instantly woke a ghostly echo.

The very day after his arrival in Thebes he had received from the high chamberlain — who had examined his letters of recommendation and recognized him as the son of his dead friend — permission to present himself to the king. This was the appointed morning. He had passed the night at the chamberlain's, who gave him several directions, and the sun had scarcely risen ere the young noble, with a throbbing heart, stood before the lofty portal of the building in which the Son of the Sun dispensed life and death to his subjects. No one noticed his entrance. Soldiers were throwing dice or wrestling in the sunny court-yards, busy servants, bearing golden dishes, glided up the steps as noiselessly as lizards, but took no heed of the stranger; priests with leopard-skins around their loins, high officials in full paraphernalia, with papyrus-rolls under their arms, strode majestically but silently over the chequered flag-stones. Guards, armed with swords or axes, stood motionless before tapestried doors.

“The queen wants her pastry” — “the prince is asking for his bath” — “the litters must be ready” — “the procession of musicians is to be arranged” — such were the orders hurrying courtiers buzzed in his ears. Menes watched the bustling throng in bewilder-

ment; his instinctive modesty, not to call it diffidence, strengthened by the awe the place inspired, deterred him from asking where to go; he was afraid to interrupt servants apparently overburdened with business; he did not yet know that a courtier was a busy idler. Holding his letter of recommendation and the invitation to an audience firmly under his arm, he at last approached a sentinel and timidly asked:

“My good friend, can't you tell me where to find the king's audience-chamber?”

The man glanced sternly at him, but made no reply.

Menes walked anxiously on up a flight of steps and down a narrow corridor. Hearing voices behind a door, he was approaching it to knock, but a slave glided out from beyond a curtain and waved him away with both hands. In reply to his wondering question the slave whispered that no one was allowed to enter this corridor; it led to the apartments of the Princess Asa-Termutis, who was studying the sacred rolls with the young Hebrew Mesu,* whose life she had once saved and who was still under her patronage. Menes asked to be guided to the king's audience-chamber, and received a minute description of the way to reach it. The youth vainly tried to follow the slave's directions, — after a half-hour's walk, which led him through a labyrinth of passages, halls, and colonnades, he was forced to admit that he had completely lost his way

* Moses.

and should wander still farther astray unless some god sent him a person who could inform him how to go.

The labyrinth of halls lengthened more and more before his discouraged gaze; the weird, fantastic gloom of these palace chambers grew still more mystical, the apartments whirled in bewildering circles before his hurried glances, the walls and ceilings seemed closing threateningly around him, the glaringly-painted figures danced yet more wildly. At last, after he was sure he had traversed three or four hundred apartments, weariness compelled him to sit down on a bench. Opposite to him was a scene depicting in vivid colors the domestic bliss of married life. He fancied the wife smiling upon her husband was Myrrah. The sight of the loving couple wholly effaced the present from Menes' mind — audience, fatigue, bewilderment, were alike forgotten. What was she, his Myrrah, feeling in Memphis, in what occupation was she probably engaged at this moment? Was she thinking of him? Undoubtedly! She stood before him; he imagined he could hear her gentle voice. He recalled with rapture her every movement, remembered many of her expressive glances, softly repeated what she had whispered to him on this or that occasion. Numerous scenes rose before him so vividly that they began to exert an exciting influence. A few days before his departure he had given her a gold ring, but when he attempted to slip the circlet on her finger it proved too tight and tore the skin. In his alarm he took the finger between his lips to try to stanch the blood, and she had been unwilling

to permit it. Now he recalled the little incident so vividly that his lips involuntarily pouted and a sweet sense of joy made his brain whirl. He saw her blush; the confused delight that had then overpowered him once more took possession of his soul; he revelled in the delicious visions. His mother also appeared before him in this flood of memories, and he congratulated himself upon having confided Myrrah to her hands. The young girl was thus protected from poverty, had a peaceful home, and was slowly maturing for him, like a rose preparing to burst into bloom.

He anticipated with a thrill of ecstasy the hour of meeting, yet almost reproached himself for thinking of meeting ere he had scarcely bade her farewell. Many days and months still intervened between that moment and the present one. A feeling of infinite longing, homesickness, stole over him. How desolate he was, far more forsaken than she. She was permitted to live at home, kind, pleasant friends surrounded her; he was far away, with cold, unsympathizing people. Who of all these thousands understood him? Were not these men like living mummies! So this was the world, this mad pursuit of emptiness, of pleasures which must shame a noble nature? "The gods cast us into this world without means," he said to himself, and cry: "now see how you'll manage to get through." We are obliged to toil hard even for the wherewithal to preserve the doubtful gift we call life. Torturing effort is required merely to keep this fleeting existence. Is it worth being maintained by endless struggles? To

thousands life is nothing more than a dark dream with a few bright moments! Is not the existence of the vast majority a perpetual conflict with want, to which even the bravest champion at last succumbs? Nay, the clearer view and deeper insight of the better class of mankind only serves to inspire a longing for the cool stillness of the rock-tomb.

Menes felt that this journey had given him numerous impressions, his comprehension had sharpened, his perceptions deepened; he beheld the world with different eyes; the separation from the object of his love also probably gave his thoughts a loftier flight, for he felt that sorrow ennobles, as joy deteriorates.

His memory was becoming absorbed in the pleasures this journey from Memphis to Thebes had afforded, he saw before him the fertile banks of the Nile over which floated richly-painted ships, he heard the distant rustling of the palm-groves from whence gleamed red or dazzlingly white country-houses, the vision of the desert, into which he had once taken a short journey from his vessel, was just rising before him, when a distant noise suddenly roused him from his reverie. What was it? Was he dreaming still? Did he hear the plashing of the Nile so distinctly? No, the echoes were sending him music; the notes of a melody fell solemnly, from a considerable distance, upon his ear. Remembering his need of assistance, he hastily started up. "I'm wasting my time here in useless memories," he said to himself, gazing intently in the direction from which the sounds came.

"That's the way to escape," he said, "I must meet people there."

He advanced nearer and nearer to the sounds, and ere he had crossed three halls, found himself in a colonnade which afforded him a view of a beautiful and magnificent ceremony, the king's morning sacrifice. The god Osiris, with stiff, awkward majesty, sat on his golden throne; his arms were pressed against his body, his hands resting on his knees, and his massive limbs, gleaming through the dense blue clouds of incense surging around him, looked as if they were emerging from a cloak. Before him stood a stately man of middle age, whose high red and white crown would have instantly marked him as the king, had not his dignity, the innate majesty of his movements, already betrayed his rank. The monarch raised both arms towards the god, and forced his proud, bold features to assume an expression of humility; he had laid all his regal ornaments aside; a false beard lengthened his chin, whose strongly-marked outlines denoted an imperious will. On both sides of the statue stood priests of lordly mien, holding in their hands silver vessels full of wine or incense. Behind them knelt female harpers, other musicians swung tabors in their beautiful arms, beat the kem-kem, or sent upwards to the ceiling the notes of a song. The rest of the dusky hall was filled with praying warriors, whose arms hung loosely before them in token of humility.

The god seemed to accept with a gracious smile the proffered homage, and often appeared to cast a friendly

glance through the clouds of incense at the monarch. The pungent, aromatic smell of the incense, the shrill, mournful music, the solemn priests, some of whom wore plumes on their heads, the semi-nude priestesses, the stony calmness of the god, and the magical light which filtered through the columns from above, shrouding the scene in a mysterious gloom, all combined to produce a strangely bewildering effect upon Menes.

"Hail to thee, Osiris, Most Holy, Ever Radiant One," chanted the priests, bowing and waving their instruments, "look graciously upon the Son of the Sun, who humbly approaches thy splendor. Has he not given thee fragrant woods? Does he not burn costly incense before thee? Has he not offered myriads of cattle in thy sanctuaries? Has he not commanded enduring stone to be brought hither for thy temples? Thou hast encompassed him with thy favor; thy radiant presence hovered around him in battles; his foes threw themselves into the river as the crocodiles plunge into the Nile; he rushed among them like the hawk darting downward, like the god Baal in the moment of his terror."

So the chant swept solemnly through the hall, now like rattling thunder, when the trumpets blended with the drums, now dying gently away, like the night-breeze whispering to the papyrus stalks the secrets of the ancient pyramids or the horrors of the burning desert, when the chords of the harps swelled and mingled with the whispering notes of the flutes. Menes was standing behind a column from which he could overlook the whole scene. The king advanced to pour wine from a

golden vessel upon the altar. Just at that moment the young Egyptian heard close behind him a noise like the twanging of a string when it is strained; he turned — on the floor, close at his right hand, knelt an archer in the act of fitting an arrow to the bow. What was an archer doing here in such an attitude? Was he going to shoot? And what was his mark? Menes saw with amazement a jewelled hand appear from behind a column and touch the kneeling man's shoulder; the whispered words: "Wait a little longer!" fell upon his ear. The actions of these two persons aroused the youth's suspicions; he watched them with strained attention; the blood rushed from his head back to his heart; he convulsively pressed his trembling body against the pillar. The archer now bent forward, braced one knee against the floor and aimed with raised, tense bow directly at the king who, while the rest of the assembly prostrated themselves, was letting the golden wine drip slowly from the vessel upon the marble of the altar. Menes for the first time clearly realized what was about to happen.—Regicide! A feverish excitement overpowered him, almost depriving him of the use of his senses. Had he come to Thebes to witness such a spectacle? His pure heart could not yet fully comprehend the unprecedented crime; to shoot the king was to him the same thing as shooting a god. What should he do? Cry out?

He shouted loudly: "Hold!" but his voice was lost in the deafening medley of sounds, like a drop of water in the ocean. The danger was increasing;

he was enraged with his own inaction; already the point of the arrow sank menacingly; without knowing what he was doing, he advanced like a person in a dream towards the altar, waving his arms incessantly. His anxiety increased as he thought he saw the high-priest, who stood at the left of the altar, exchange glances with the murderous archer; the priest gave the soldier a meaning look, Menes, with arms flung upward, rushed towards the altar, but ere he reached it an arrow sped swiftly through the papyrus-roll he still carried and fell, rattling, at Rameses' feet. The vessel dropped from the sovereign's hand; a medley of cries for help, shouts of rage, and broken notes of song, instantly filled the hall. Some surrounded the king, others drew their weapons; Menes pointed to the place from whence the shaft had come, picked up the arrow, and gave it to the pallid monarch. Tidings of what had occurred spread through the throng like lightning. "Murder! Regicide!" was shouted from one end of the vast hall to the other; the shaven priests stood as motionless as their god; the crowd surged to and fro like a rising storm. Questions, answers, curses, trembled on the air, dense with the heavy odor of incense, till, at last, when the rumor had spread sufficiently, all the voices blended in a cry of fury. The confusion was greatest at the place from which the arrow had come, where the bystanders seized an archer, who, looking his foes defiantly in the face, quietly allowed himself to be bound without making any resistance.

Meanwhile the king, unheeding the tumult around him, was standing at the altar with a thoughtful, dreamy expression. The high-priest advanced to express his condolence but, when he extended his hand, the monarch glanced at him with a look so wild that the prelate involuntarily quailed. The arrow passed from hand to hand; but the king waved it back when some one tried to show it to him again. As he raised his lofty brow, now darkened by a cloud of sadness, he saw at his feet the supposed criminal, whom the soldiers meantime had dragged forward, and whose instant condemnation was evidently expected by the assembly. They had bowed the archer's head by force, but the king, without vouchsafing him a single glance, banished the gloom from his features and held out his hand to Menes, who was standing beside him.

"I owe you my life," he said gently, "and whoever you may be, I thank you. Henceforth you shall remain with me and must assume the title: 'Friend of the King'!"

Menes timidly drew back, but Rameses did not allow him to yield to his diffidence.

"Whoever offers his body for the king's shield," he said, "has a right to the highest honors, for a god must have guided him to the presence of the imperilled sovereign. This arrow would have slain me, if you had not stayed it, and I regard you as an envoy from my divine father, the radiant Râ. I trustfully place my hand in yours. The subject I reward must accept the recompense as submissively as the one I punish, his

chastisement, and I reward you to show my people how their monarch honors faithful service. Revere and pay homage to this man," he cried, addressing his attendants, "from this day his rank is scarcely inferior to my own."

Menes doubtless perceived the king's shrewdness in thus distinguishing him before the whole assemblage; it could not fail to fan to the utmost his subjects' zeal to serve him.

Rameses, glancing at the kneeling archer, now asked:

"Do you recognize this man as my would-be assassin?"

"Yes," replied Menes, "he was standing behind that column."

"Try to extort from him the name of the instigator of this deed, and then drown him," the sovereign commanded, turning to his attendants.

The morning sacrifice was now considered completed. Rameses, leaning on Menes' arm, passed through the ranks of his rejoicing warriors, bestowing on the assembly bright, gracious glances, which revealed no trace of mental anxiety. The entrance to the royal apartments was surrounded by so vast a throng of Theban citizens that the soldiers with difficulty forced open a narrow passage for the sovereign, to whom thousands of hands were outstretched in homage. Women even flung themselves on the ground before him, offering bouquets of flowers or trying to kiss his

feet. Rameses bestowed many cordial words upon the crowded populace, and at last disappeared behind the curtain hanging over the entrance, around which the people surged until a chamberlain came forth and held up his hand to the turbulent throng. When silence was restored, the official said: "The Son of the Sun thanks you for these proofs of your affection and sympathy. But he now entreats his people to leave him to himself. This incident has deeply stirred his heart. He needs rest and forbearance."

Upon this the crowd withdrew on tiptoe, in order not to disturb their beloved ruler.

Menes, by royal command, had been given a room in the palace where, after reflecting upon the incident that had just occurred, he had scarcely rested, ere he was summoned by a servant to the king's presence.

The curtain had barely dropped behind him, admitting him to the glittering apartment with its richly-gilded furniture, when he perceived with surprise the change that had taken place in Rameses' features. The cheerful expression they had worn half an hour before was transformed into a very grave one, the haughty figure lay prostrate on a couch as if utterly broken down—in striking contrast to the feigned indifference he had assumed so long as he was before his subjects' eyes.

"Can this morning's event have so shaken your courage, my noble master. . . ." Menes began with sincere compassion, but Rameses, raising himself, answered:

"Forgive my weakness, you are right, I ought not to allow my feelings so much sway."

"For your people's sake you ought not, my King," Menes ventured to continue, though he regretted his hasty words.

The king nodded sorrowfully and sat gazing silently into vacancy.

"Give no further thought to the matter, I beseech you," said the young Egyptian. "Some ingrate, or perhaps a madman, devised this plot against your sacred life. Drive the shadow from your brow, divert your mind by the chase, music, or dancing. Does not the love of your whole people, of which you have just received the most tender proofs, outweigh the deed of a single individual?"

"A single individual, young man," said the king sadly, while his eyes filled with tears. "Do you suppose this man is the only person who desires to pierce my heart? You err. You do not know the life I have led for months—threatened on all sides like a noble stag pursued by a hundred hunters. Let me tell you—but secretly."

He interrupted himself, signed to the slave to retire and then, laying his hand familiarly on Menes' shoulder, drew him down upon his couch and continued in a more gentle tone: "I know neither your name nor your origin, yet I trust you. I would fain win in you a friend who will help me bear the burden of the crown and hold before my throne the shield of loyalty, therefore I will banish from my soul every shadow of sus-

pcion. You are the only person to whom I make communications of this kind; to the preserver of my life I may venture to open my heart, put my dark conjectures into words."

"Oh, how happy I should consider myself if I could merit your confidence, my august master," Menes fervently replied. "I have always longed to be permitted to stand by a monarch's side as his counsellor, be suffered to become his second, keener eyes, which might pierce the huts of poverty and the temple walls of crafty priests. Even in my earliest childhood I imagined myself in the lonely grandeur of a sovereign, and my boyish heart told me: a king is not a happy man! Nay, I often thanked the gods that they did not send me into the world as the heir of a throne."

"I will tell you everything that troubles me," cried Rameses, grasping his friend's hand. "You will understand me; I see it by your bearing. You shall fill a father's place to me, for if you did not give me life, you have bestowed it a second time, and I can never repay you for the deed; my favor is but a feeble attempt to discharge the debt. Yes, you are right. We sovereigns are not happy. That is why I have always wanted one man to whom I could devote myself without reserve, without fearing that nothing but selfish purposes brought him to my side for, in spite of their flatteries, a monarch's courtiers are his greatest foes. Whoever addresses us desires something; no one gives—everybody asks. Life on a throne is a desolate existence; only fools can envy us, only fools can be happy with a crown upon

their brows. Our lot is a lonely one, lonely as a ruined rock-temple, — the burning sand blows around its tottering columns, stone statues tower within its cool recesses, nothing stirs far or near, save the scorching sand by day or by night the slinking jackal; brooding stillness, glowing silence, majestic marble walls!"

Rameses rose. His quivering lips betrayed the convulsive effort he was making to control his emotion. The vivid consciousness of his wretchedness had rendered him unusually communicative; his reserved heart overflowed; it seemed to give him a sort of melancholy pleasure to probe all his wounds and let his blood flow before the eyes of a sympathizing friend. He strode swiftly up and down the room, while Menes, deeply moved, watched him with tearful eyes. "When artists paint kings upon temple-walls or in the chambers of rock-tombs, they give their features an expression of serene dignity, proud satisfaction — oh, how their beautiful colors lie," murmured Menes. "Beneath the canopy of the throne care builds its nest; the radiance of the crown attracts the ghostly moth unhappiness, whose black wings flutter around the glittering diadem. I see I was not mistaken when I imagined sorrow to be the inseparable companion of sovereignty."

"No, no!" sighed the mighty monarch, "whom dare we trust? I can no longer believe in love, loyalty, or virtue. Were the goddess of truth herself to appear before me and try to convince me of the existence of these noble qualities, I should retort: 'Hypocrite!' Love, loyalty, virtue are merely the empty names of things

which have no existence. Even the firmest character melts into pulp under the sunlight of royalty. I experienced this only yesterday. I had heard of a Jew who spoke evil of princes and who was praised as a strong, resolute character. I sent for the man and he explained, with great ingenuity, why sovereigns were at least unnecessary in the world. I was delighted with his candor, but wished to test him. He was poor, and I gave him a lucrative position on the canal-works. Then his hatred of royalty instantly vanished — now he kisses my feet and anxiously enquires every morning how I have rested!"

"And what did you wish him to do?" asked Menes.

"What? Refuse the position! He ought to have hated me, then I might perhaps have hated him, but I should not have been forced to despise him. I'm sorry for the man. . . .

"And our solitude," Rameses continued. "Only the hermit in his cell can feel anything like it. We have neither fathers nor mothers, brothers, daughters, nor sons. Power is a poor compensation for years of loneliness, amusements do not supply the place of genuine joys. I can put thousands to death, but all my authority cannot force one individual to love me! Oh, ye gods, take the crown from my head, it is burning into my brain."

Menes rose and kissed his sovereign's hand. His face expressed such tender pity, blended with the loftiest devotion, that Rameses, deeply touched, warmly embraced him.

"You trust me — pardon my saying so — but you trust me too quickly, my King!" said the youth. "You have not yet tested me sufficiently to be able to assert positively that I have all the high qualities your generosity probably ascribes to me. I, too, am an erring, fallible mortal, and the service I rendered you is no guarantee of my virtue."

"What is the purpose of your words?" asked Rameses, with a grave look, "do you want to shake me off like an importunate beggar? Do you reject my friendship? Must I stand before you as a royal mendicant?"

"How can you talk so, my Lord," replied the youth. "I believed it my duty to warn you, ere you devoted yourself entirely to me."

Lines of thought furrowed the king's brow. Then he answered slowly:

"It is true, I am too impetuous in my feelings, I instantly obey each impulse of my heart; you do right to remind me of it, for my rash confidence has wrought me many a mischief."

Menes now presented his letter of recommendation and the document granting him an audience. The king, delighted to find in his preserver the son of a faithful servant of his dead father, examined the rolls and then said: "It is not these papers, these proofs that your family have been faithful adherents of our royal house, which inspires my confidence in you; I trust your eyes more than these documents. Take them, they can no longer strengthen my friendship for you."

Rameses now told the astonished Menes that he suspected his own relatives of plotting his destruction. He was compelled to specially distrust his son Scha-em-Djam (who had formerly been his favorite) and his wife Urmaa-nofru-râ also cherished evil designs in her malicious heart. He was sure of no one except his daughter Asa-Termutis; he knew that she loved him. In reply to the young man's enquiry how he had gained the hatred of his nearest relatives, Rameses explained that his son and Urmaa-nofru-râ desired to see the Hebrew race completely exterminated. "It was true," he said, "that the Jews showed many of their bad qualities to the injury of his own people, yet he could not resolve to treat the whole nation cruelly. The priests, enraged by his tolerance, were his most malignant foes, nay he most feared their atrocities; obeying their advice (as the oracle of Amon also, when questioned, supported it) he had given at the commencement of his reign the order to slay all the first-born children of the Hebrews, a command he now deeply repented. His favorite daughter, Asa-Termutis, had saved one delicate boy, whom the priests wanted to kill because he surpassed them in wisdom, though the youth was under the personal protection of the princess. He knew that his father Seti I. had loved a Jewess and he, too, admired the fairer complexion of the Hebrew women; he wished by degrees to blend this race with his own nation and therefore permitted marriages between Jews and Egyptians, though the priests de-claimed against them. Menes was eagerly thinking of

Myrrah, but still concealed his secret in his throbbing heart.

"So," the monarch concluded, "I indeed emerged as victor from the battles with the Chetas; my war-club towered over their heads; they fell like straw under my chariots, but now the enmity of my nearest relatives raises its subtle head to destroy me; who knows whether the arrow you caught this morning with your own body was not forged by my own flesh and blood, fitted to the bow-string by a hand that should guard and cherish me. Peace rules in my kingdom; every one is safe; a feeble woman could fearlessly walk alone from Memphis to Thebes. I, only, who have created this order by the keenness of my sword, stand insecurely on my lonely height; my own kindred menace me, and the priests raise their hands against my life."

Almost before the Pharaoh stopped speaking, loud voices were heard at the door. A slave announced Urmaa-nofru-râ, Asa-Termutis, and Prince Scha-em-Djam. The king's face darkened as he heard the names and he was about to make a sign not to admit the visitors, but a glance at Menes changed his intention.

"Watch them," he whispered, "I should have sent them away, had not your presence here afforded me the opportunity to test my relatives' conduct by the eyes of an unprejudiced spectator. You will perceive with horror that I have told you no fable! Summon all your penetration, and try to search the most hidden lines of their features."

The curtain rustled back ; the queen, a woman whose face, though by no means destitute of beauty, wore a harsh expression, entered the room and with a studied display of feeling, threw herself on her husband's breast.

"Oh, Isis! how terrified I was when the tidings reached me," she murmured in a tone of exhaustion. "Your precious life in danger! What a horrible event! But the gods protect it — I see you safe."

"Has the man confessed who instigated the deed?" asked the prince, with sullen, distrustful glances.

"He has," replied the king, inspired by a shrewd idea.

Rameses was not mistaken in his conjecture. As soon as the false words had passed his lips, he saw the trembling prince struggling to maintain his composure.

"He has — impossible. . . ." he stammered confusedly.

"Why is it impossible?" asked his father.

"And who led him to attempt the crime?" said Scha-em-Djam watchfully.

"Who? I don't know."

"How can that be?"

"He hasn't confessed yet," replied Rameses, exchanging glances with Menes, "but I hope he will. I hope so, and then woe betide his tempters."

"They deserve to die," gasped the prince with visible effort, as he obsequiously lowered his timid gaze.

"Yes, they *do* deserve it," said Rameses, with ill-disguised contempt; "I already suspect the base wretches who transform my most faithful subjects into tools of treason; whoever they may be they shall not escape my vengeance, even if I am forced to shed consecrated blood."

Urmaa-nofru-râ intentionally turned the conversation to other subjects, enquired about the tame lions, the apes, the artificial ponds in the parks, complained of her female slaves, and finally harshly rebuked her stepdaughter, Asa-Termutis, for her want of affection in not having yet spoken a word to her father, who had been rescued from a great peril that very morning. Asa-Termutis, who at her entrance had fixed her eyes on Menes as if oblivious of everything else and had scarcely averted her gaze until now, slowly turned her face towards her royal mother.

"Want of affection, do you say?" she replied with marked emphasis, "it seems to me I might with more justice call you ungrateful, for who is the person that most deserves our praise? Yet, though at this moment he is the foremost man in the whole kingdom, you appear to completely forget him."

With these words she gracefully approached the embarrassed Menes and, while her large black eyes, shadowed by long, dark lashes, sparkled enthusiastically and her bosom swelled with passionate emotion, laid her delicate, jewelled hand in his, saying:

"Noble youth, you have preserved my father's life; I thank you far more fervently than if you had saved

my own. Egypt utters her gratitude with my voice."

Menes felt a burning flush of shame crimson his cheeks, he tried to smile, to stammer a few modest words, but when he met the glance of the noble-hearted princess he lowered his eyes in confusion.

"You are right, my child," cried the king, "we do owe him our thanks. I am glad you remembered it, Asa-Termutis."

The princess, seeing the young Egyptian's blush, realized the boldness of her act and felt her own cheeks glow. Hastily releasing her hand, she embraced her father, hiding her face on his as if she never meant to show it to the world again. Rameses soon felt hot tears streaming down his cheek.

"You are weeping, my child," he whispered, deeply touched. "Yet I know your nature; any vehement emotion calls forth tears; you have been just the same ever since you reached your thirteenth year—do you remember how you wept when your gazelle died? Those tears might have caused an inundation from the Nile in a year of drought."

Asa-Termutis, still weeping, nestled closer to her father's sinewy neck.

"Yes, you love me," said the king smiling, overjoyed by these tokens of affection from his favorite child, "these silent tears give me far more pleasure than all the congratulations of my courtiers— are more precious than the gems of my Ethiopian mines. They are true, they flow from a spring untainted by false-

hood, and I was wrong in saying that kings have no daughters; the gods have blessed me, at least, with one dearer than my whole vast realm."

The queen and her stepson witnessed this scene with scarcely concealed anger. Urmaa constantly made the prince signs intended to turn the noble relation between her husband and his daughter into ridicule, while the prince, as Menes distinctly perceived, darted sullen glances at his sister, nay even clenched his hand under his cloak. Once the queen, smiling scornfully, bent towards him and whispered something in his ear which made him stamp his foot.

When the princess had regained her composure Rameses, knowing that she was not averse to a display of her intellect, questioned her about her studies. Even in childhood she had surpassed all her teachers and, while her girl-companions were playing ball or rowing in their boats, she was bending her young head over ancient papyrus-rolls. Asa-Termutis, with great intellectual vivacity, instantly told her father about the mysteries of astronomy, in which she had recently been absorbed, related her dispute with the high-priest, who had made an error in calculating the course of the stars, and also mentioned the healing power of several herbs which she had discovered while experimenting in her laboratory. In this connection she spoke of a plant, which she could not describe without secret horror. It was the greatest foe of human life; taken in small doses it would cause sleep, in larger ones death. Urmaa-nofru-râ requested a minute explana-

tion of the properties of this herb, and seemed to take a remarkable interest in its mysterious power. The venom was contained, Asa-Termutis said, in black seeds concealed in a green capsule, but it would be better not to talk about this terrible flower, which had doubtless been sown by some evil spirit to destroy men. The king noticed his wife's interest in the malign blossom and made a sign to Menes which the youth evidently understood, for he turned pale with horror. The plant was still under discussion, when a slave entered and announced that the criminal who had aimed his shaft at the sacred person of the Son of the Sun refused to give any information about those who had tempted him to the atrocious crime; his sole reply, no matter how long he was urged, was a silent shake of the head or a sorrowful smile. While the man was making this report, Rameses narrowly watched his wife and son, whose efforts to feign indifference did not escape his notice.

"Kill him," said the prince as carelessly as possible.

"Why permit him to live any longer, if he will confess nothing?" said the queen. "Oh, my husband, I beseech you, relieve your family from the anxiety of knowing that an infamous wretch who seeks your life still walks the earth. You owe us this precaution."

"You mean I ought to have him put to death?" asked Rameses.

"Certainly," cried the prince.

"At once!" exclaimed Urmaa hastily.

"Are you of the same opinion, Asa-Termutis?" said the king, turning to his daughter.

"He has deserved to die, my noble father," the princess murmured, "to die a thousand deaths, yet I pity the base wretch, for every life the gods have bestowed is sacred to me. So I beseech you to send him to the Ethiopian gold-mines; there let him suffer and atone. I feel as if no man has the right to demand another's life; but to punish guilt is a duty."

"Your daughter speaks nobly," said Menes; "be generous, my sovereign; his death can be of no service to you, his life in the mines no injury."

"Impossible," raved the queen, "he must die. You are both faint-hearted creatures. Let the high-priest consult the stars or the Apis in Memphis, he will announce that the gods desire this villain's death."

The king, casting a wrathful glance at his wife, rose from his seat; he probably suspected why both she and her son so eagerly desired the archer's death; they wanted to silence him forever. It was evidently important that the man should speak. "Bring the prisoner in," he called to the retiring slave, "I'll ask him myself whether he is resolved to carry his secret into his grave."

The time before the assassin's arrival was spent by Rameses in pacing up and down the room, while Urmah, as soon as she heard that the criminal was to appear there, turned pale and rose in visible confusion.

"Come, my son," she said with effort, "let us leave this apartment, we will not witness the painful scene;

our sensitive natures cannot behold such a torturing spectacle."

Scha-em-Djam, trembling violently, rose.

"No one is to quit this room," said Rameses, turning.

"What, my husband? What did you say?"

"You must remain."

"We *must*? You will not permit us — you will compel us?"

"Compel? I request you."

"If you only request," replied Urmaa, forcing a smile, "I also *request* you to allow me to go."

No answer.

"Do you hear, my royal husband?"

"I hear."

"And you refuse my request?"

"I have reasons for doing so."

"And they are?"

"No matter."

"I desire to know them!"

"Are you vexed with me?" asked Rameses, who fancied he detected a tone of reproachful defiance in his wife's voice.

"You must both," he added, stifling his agitation, "watch this assassin in my presence, in order to discover who wished to use him to take my life."

Menes guessed that the Pharaoh intended to see what impression the criminal would probably produce on his secret allies, for the youth himself now scarcely doubted that there was an understanding between them.

“That is quite a different matter,” replied the queen, “your words seemed to express a concealed accusation, a suspicion — but enough — I will leave my vindication to others. There comes the prisoner.”

Several armed men led in the archer, who had been stripped of his clothing and bore on his back the marks of severe blows. A tremor shook the thin, muscular figure, but his features, especially the close shut lips, expressed a resolute will. As he entered, he looked at the queen with a glance which the latter returned by one full of significance.

“So you will not confess who induced you to aim the arrow at your sovereign?” Rameses calmly began.

The man again exchanged meaning glances with Urmaa.

“No,” he said.

“Will you give me no reasons for your deed?” the Pharaoh continued. “Have I ever wronged you? Have I treated you unjustly? Have you any cause to hate me?”

The prince, as Menes noticed, seemed to nod to the man to keep silence. The archer shook his head and struck his breast with his clenched hand.

“Do you know that you must die?”

“I know it.”

“And that you can save your life by answering, by confessing?”

“I swore to keep silence,” replied the prisoner in a hollow tone.

The slave-overseer had entered with the archer;

Rameses made a sign to the former, who instantly drew the curtains of a doorway aside, revealing to the obdurate criminal, who shrank back shuddering, a man holding in his muscular hand a red-hot rod. Menes' breath came heavily as the bondsman entered and held the smoking iron close to the prisoner's neck. The archer shivered and, with a gasping sigh, his head sank on his breast; Menes thought the moment had come when the agony of death must wring the confession from him. The bondsman glanced inquiringly at Rameses; the executioner's eyes sparkled cruelly and his bare arm was stretched eagerly towards his victim. All present waited in the utmost suspense to see whether the king would have recourse to this terrible ally of justice. At last Rameses advanced a step towards the prisoner.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Hui," murmured the archer.

A pause ensued. Urmaa seemed to breathe more freely; the man's firmness must have inspired confidence, she ventured to look around her with a steadier gaze.

"Well, Hui," said the king kindly, "I might have you tortured to wrest your confession from you, but since, as you say, you are sworn to silence, I will lead you to no perjury. You serve those who used you against me, faithfully,—by all the gods, *very* faithfully! For you knew that death was already extending its hand towards you and that you might save yourself by a frank confession, yet you closed your lips. Would

you serve me as loyally as you have served my foes?"

Hui looked in amazement first at the king, then at the queen, and finally fixed his eyes on vacancy.

"I hope," Rameses continued, "I hope that I have found in you a faithful servant. You shall live, and from this hour you shall be enrolled in the ranks of the attendants nearest to my person. Nearest, do you hear? It shall be your office to serve me at table."

The archer pressed his hand to his head as though trying to convince himself that he was not dreaming.

"What are you doing, my royal husband?" cried the queen starting up. "This is carrying your generosity too far. Will you trust your life to a murderer? Will you go to rest on a naked sword? In the name of all the gods, give up your purpose."

"Let me have my way," replied the Pharaoh, "and be content."

"Hui? Will you learn to love me, if I prove a kind master?"

"My lord, you are jesting," stammered the bewildered soldier.

"No, I am in earnest."

"You will receive a worthless fellow like me among your attendants?"

Everyone present was amazed; Urmaa, unconscious of what she was doing, tore an ornament from her dress; her features were distorted with rage and terror.

"I will," said the king, gazing keenly at his wife.

"Oh, my sovereign, do not!" cried the man, in an almost desperate tone.

"What is your objection?" replied the monarch, quietly.

"I do not deserve such favor," murmured the archer, dragging himself, as if utterly crushed, to the Pharaoh's feet.

"Make yourself worthy then, I will not seek to know who led you so far astray as to attempt your sovereign's life, but I saw that the deed did not come from your heart. We'll see what we can make of you. Take him away, and give him food and clothing."

Rameses left the room. Urmaa, too, withdrew with her son, both extremely perplexed by the unexpected turn of affairs they had witnessed, and scarcely able to conceal their bewilderment.

The archer cowered on the floor until the soldiers almost dragged his tottering form away. Menes, congratulating himself on having obtained the favor of such a master, accompanied the princess to offer up prayers in the temple.

CHAPTER IX.

IN A TOMB.

MENES soon became indispensable to his sovereign. He gave his counsel in affairs of state, was obliged to constantly attend the king, slept in an adjoining chamber, eat at the same table, and accompanied him to the chase. Often, when a weight of melancholy oppressed Rameses' heart, Menes, in the tenderest way, dispelled his troubled mood. In return his master tried to show his appreciation by every means in his power, not only expressing his satisfaction in words, but setting the seal to his approval by gifts, often of the costliest nature.

Thus, he had had his favorite's room furnished in the most sumptuous manner; gay embroideries glowed on the walls, flowers adorned the vases, his food was of the choicest kind, and by the royal order he was supplied with garments so costly that the youth declined to wear them.

As the palace seemed to be undermined by a secret conspiracy, life within its walls was like that in a tempest-tossed ship. No loud voices were heard, only whispered accents floated through its halls; timid footsteps, anxious glances, troubled questions everywhere prevailed, as though the arrow once aimed at the king were constantly hissing through the air and an assassin might be lurking behind every pillar. No one trusted

his neighbor; guards stood at every door, soldiers were stationed in the court-yards, in the anterooms, around the whole building. Rameses had given Menes charge of this military defence, and thereby made him the guardian of his life.

The young noble, though proud of this high office, had no love for it; but he perceived that he was the only person to whom his royal master could confide his safety with perfect security. Menes changed the Pharaoh's sleeping-room to a chamber in the very centre of the gigantic structure, and stationed the most trustworthy soldiers in the adjacent apartments, so that Rameses' night quarters resembled a camp rather than a peaceful residence. The queen and her son, by order of the Friend of the King, slept in the extreme outer portion of the building, probably half a league distant. Of course since Menes had stood nearest to the throne and become, to a certain degree, the prop of the kingdom, he encountered many envious, hostile glances, and felt that his life was perhaps no less imperilled than his royal master's, but he did not allow this to disturb his mind. One night the king cried out loudly in his sleep; instantly drums beat and trumpets blared, but when Menes rushed to the monarch's couch, the Pharaoh said he had had an unpleasant dream. From this time the young man ordered lamps to be placed in the sleeping-rooms, turning darkness into light.

Hui, the new-made attendant, showed his devotion in every way. Menes often sought to lure from him 'the conspirators' secrets, of which he must be aware,

but the man invariably refused, protesting that he would be faithful unto death to his master, only he must not be asked to speak of what had urged him to the crime he now repented. Rameses hoped to gradually induce the man to make a confession which would disclose the heads of the conspiracy. Gifts and kind words were futile; Hui showed deep emotion when his master talked with him, but still kept his secret. At last, while Hui was helping him disrobe, Rameses seriously represented to him that his obstinate silence was not only ungrateful, but that he was thereby exposing his master's life to ever-increasing peril.

"If you will name the leaders of this conspiracy," said the king, "I can punish, destroy them, and thus render myself safe, but if you remain mute, the number of these criminals will constantly increase, until some day they will deal me a death-blow."

Hui, shamed by this gentleness, after a long mental struggle answered that he would write the names of all the ringleaders that very night; then the roll could be found in his room without his knowledge, and he would at least avoid a direct violation of his oath: "*to tell no ear who had asked him to murder the king.*"

The Pharaoh joyously informed Menes of Hui's resolution. Both spent the night in conjectures and consultations, scarcely able to wait for the morning which was to give them these important disclosures.

"I shall have them in my hands," cried Rameses exultingly, "and they shall expiate their guilt, even if my own blood has rebelled against me."

When, in the grey light of early dawn, they entered Hui's room to obtain possession of the document, they found—to their rage and horror—the poor fellow lying, weltering in his blood, with a mortal wound in his breast; the roll, still untouched, lay on the floor beside the couch.

Rameses spent several terrible days. Shutting himself into his room, he took no food, but sat speechless, sleepless, motionless. Menes, who was no less agitated than his master, was not allowed admittance until the third day. Both, renewing their vows of friendship, fell into each other's arms and wept. Did the threads of this conspiracy extend so far? Were eaves-droppers about the king? Was every word he uttered known? Each breath counted, each footstep followed? Oh! terrible might of the priesthood, which had power to undermine long-tested fidelity, corrode with its venom all who surrounded the sovereign—by what means was this invisible serpent's head to be crushed?

“The ground is reeling under my feet,” were Rameses' first words as Menes approached him—“I am helpless, I am contending against invulnerable spirits.”

Menes wrathfully advised sending the queen and her son into exile; but Rameses did not venture to pursue this course, objecting that he had no positive proofs of their guilt; the step would be so startling to the nation and, if he should act thus harshly without due investigation, he might be accused of injustice.

But from this time the Pharaoh would see neither

wife nor son. Both were refused admittance to his presence. Urmaa visited the temples all the more zealously; the priests were delighted with her piety, and she was loudly praised for praying for the husband who neglected her. Some asserted that several times during these prayers she had clutched a dagger, as if resolved not to survive the loss of Rameses' favor. The royal lady was often seen going to the temples with eyes reddened by weeping, or heard at night crying out that she felt desolate and forsaken. The busy tongues of her female attendants circulated through Thebes rumors that it was feared Rameses' harshness would destroy his delicate wife.

Menes commanded that all dishes set before the monarch should first be tasted by two negro slaves. One morning, shortly after Hui's death, these two slaves, after sipping the king's morning drink, instantly fell asleep. They were watched. At the end of an hour one recovered his consciousness, the other never woke again. The milk had evidently been poisoned and, as Menes suspected, by the very plant in which the queen had recently displayed so much interest. Rameses gave the slave who recovered — though his body never fully regained its former strength — a small estate in the country, to show his subjects how generously he was ready to reward all who sacrificed themselves for him. The suspicion that this attempt at poisoning emanated from the queen was increased by the circumstance that Menes, while walking in the palace grounds one afternoon, chanced to meet Ur-

maa-nofru-râ, who, with every sign of embarrassment, glided out of a clump of bushes and, when Menes approached, hastily flung a handful of flowers on the grass behind her. When asked what she was seeking, she answered with a smile that she had intended to arrange a bouquet for her husband. Then, turning eagerly from what was apparently an unpleasant subject, she questioned the young noble about her husband's health, intimating that he no longer loved her and shunned any tokens of her affection, thereby making her extremely miserable. Rameses was fickle; during his stay in Memphis she had noticed with indignation his admiration for a Jewish dancing-girl who had been brought secretly by night to the palace; but, as a chaste wife, she would say nothing about the matter. Then, assuming an air of conscious virtue, she sternly censured her husband's mode of life, which must inevitably arouse the anger of the Immortals, and intimated that she herself lived in far closer communion with the gods, to whom she daily prayed for the salvation of her husband's soul — he was following the path to destruction. Then she managed to shed a few tears, hoped that Rameses might repent, and finally, with a skill that showed long practice, fainted. While her women, who hurried to her assistance, were bearing her away, their lamentations long awoke the echoes of the palace, as they assailed the gods with the question why their kind mistress was forced to suffer so deeply.

Menes' heart was filled with loathing; a wicked woman, he thought, is more dangerous than a mascu-

line foe, as the uræus serpent is more deadly than the lion. He related the scene to the king with such visible abhorrence of Urmaa, that the Pharaoh pressed him all the more warmly to his heart, thanking him for the solicitude with which he guarded him. But at the same moment Rameses cursed the day when, to conciliate the vanquished Syrian king, he had wedded his daughter.

But, besides these disturbances within the palace, there was something else that kept Menes continually in suspense and, spite of royal favor, made him long to turn his back as soon as possible upon this scene of melancholy splendor, gilded misery, and hypocrisy. After some time he fancied that Asa-Termutis was showing an unusual degree of interest in him, an interest that often troubled him; he vainly tried to persuade himself that he was wrong, vainly told himself that imagination was playing him one of the pranks she often lavishes upon her favorites; the princess might perhaps be unreserved, impulsive, and he had mistaken these traits of character for concealed affection. "She is merely trifling with you," he murmured to himself, "you serve as the toy of her royal caprice. How should the unprecedented idea of bestowing anything save friendship on one separated from her by so wide a gulf, enter the mind of the haughty princess?" He watched her more closely, and noticed that as soon as he addressed her she blushed and seemed confused. Once he surprised her in the temple of Amon, prostrating herself before the god with an expression of the deep-

est mental anguish on her noble features. On perceiving him she tried with lightning-like speed to assume a look of indifference, in which she only partially succeeded. She was often gentle and addressed him in a submissive tone, then without any apparent cause was again every inch the princess, answering him as if she had lowered her dignity, or even showed him her displeasure. When dining with her at Rameses' table, her manner was often so cold and haughty that the king was once compelled to reprove her for it. The next instant she was so completely transformed that Rameses had reason to smilingly restrain her artless familiarity. Through all these varying moods Menes retained his timid reserve. He remembered Myrrah, and the image of the simple girl, he felt, was never dimmed by the bewildering splendor of the princess, whose beauty dazzled, whose intellect startled, but who did not have the lasting power of attraction peculiar to the young Jewess. Asa-Termutis had generous feelings, witty ideas, but she did not possess the modest humility that made more impression on Menes' heart than all this brilliant vivacity.

If Menes accompanied the princess in the evening to her apartments, which were on the opposite side of the courtyard, she often thanked him in a manner so significant that the youth was alarmed. Sometimes he caught her eyes resting with a rapturous expression on his face, then, blushing deeply, she instantly averted them; often she tried to destroy his composure by a haughty, steadfast gaze, — a purpose she usually accom-

plished ; though she gained her object still better by plying him with petulant, ingenious questions, which she put with so much skill, answered herself, varied, and asked again, that the young man found it difficult to follow her flights of thought, his intellect belonging to the slow and searching, rather than the quick, sprightly order.

One day in particular long disturbed Menes' mind. He did not dream when in the morning Asa-Termutis invited him to join her in an excursion up the Nile, of the peculiar experience awaiting him. The princess proposed to visit her rock-tomb, which had just been finished — she wanted his opinion of the architecture and paintings. A slender gilded boat, whose gay sails fluttered in the morning breeze, lay at the foot of the huge portal of the palace, from which the princess, surrounded by her attendants, now came forth with a radiant smile upon her lips, — like the moon emerging from the shadow of the clouds. Menes walked by her side, sometimes changing the position of the huge umbrella, or arranging a fold of her transparent robe.

“What a cool, fresh morning,” said the princess gaily, as the costly sandals protecting her dainty feet trod the narrow plank leading to the boat. Menes wanted to give her his arm, but with a merry laugh she swung herself as lightly as a dancing-girl upon the purple cushions the black slaves had arranged. The skiff rocked as if enraptured to bear so lovely a burden. Menes took his place beside Asa-Termutis, the sails

were set, and the boat, with its superbly-dressed occupants, sped through the dashing waves of the ancient Nile towards its western shore. At first the sight of the magnificent landscape silenced every tongue; all eyes rested in delight upon haughty Thebes, towering proudly aloft with her temples, palaces, colonnades, and palm-trees steeped in the ruddy glow of dawn, like some gigantic monster, dripping with blood, whose mighty limbs were mirrored in the quivering Nile. A violet mist hovered over the whole scene, subduing its imposing magnificence almost to loveliness; still farther away the pylons of the temple of Amon-Râ rose like two mountains and, on the remotest verge of the horizon, the summits of the Arabian chain were sharply outlined against the sky. On the opposite shore, towards which they were steering, the black walls of the City of the Dead rose menacingly before them like an open coffin; farther up the stone colossi of Amenophis, glowing in the rosy light, sat in their chairs like fiery guardians of the dawn, their hands resting on their knees, their silent faces turned towards Thebes, as if they could hardly contain their delight in beholding all this glittering splendor. The murmur of the awakening city floated in subdued sounds over the water; the chants of the priests, the cries of the street peddlers, the commands issued to the soldiers, could be plainly distinguished. The bakers were now opening their shops, the weavers their rooms; the shoemaker was at work on his unfinished sandals; the dyer was going to his dirty task, the fishermen were casting their nets, the

joiner was planing some rich man's table or inlaying it with costly wood, and the artist was dipping his brush in some color to paint with careful touch upon the exquisitely-shaped porcelain dish a lotus-blossom or a crocodile—but the embalmer was also preparing to make his corpses ready for their last repose. Gradually the rosy flush of dawn paled; colors became sharper, figures more distinct, and the sun flooded river and city with pleasant warmth.

“How strange it is,” said the princess, “that on a morning so full of invigorating life, we have nothing better to do than to seek a tomb. And yet it is natural. Even in the tumult of joy we ought not to forget that we are happy only by the permission of death; does not his hand always hold our leading strings—are we not mere puppets, dancing at his will?”

“Certainly,” said Menes, absorbed in the view of the frowning City of the Dead. “It is well to choose, hollow out, and decorate the spot where we must remain the longest time. The residence of the living man is like an indifferent tavern, which he leaves after a short stay, the abode of the dead is the destination of his journey, where he is to make himself comfortable.”

The princess listened eagerly to the speaker. When he paused, she remained silent a short time and then said:

“Yet why do we love this life, which has no love for us but unceasingly tortures us? Is not existence like a beloved mistress, who teases, vexes, offends, nay even

wounds us, yet whom we cannot forsake — because — because, perhaps, she is so beautiful?"

Menes thought of Myrrah, and a flush of sudden emotion crimsoned his brow, which the princess noticed and perhaps attributed to herself. She cast a timid side-glance at him and, when the youth stooped to seize a blossom floating on the water, begged him in the tenderest tones to give her the flower. He did so, and she thanked him with a look which the young noble intentionally avoided. Asa-Termutis felt the slight, and leaning back she remained silent until the boat stopped at the shore where they were to disembark. From here their way led southward to a little valley which, when reached, afforded a view of a gateway opening deep into the chain of mountains. Laborers were still at work upon this portal, whose height was most imposing; the grooves of the huge locks were just chiselled; tall scaffoldings led to it. Immediately after the arrival of the princess, the architect deferentially offered to guide her through the rooms, a suggestion which was graciously accepted. Several workmen preceded the party to light their steps, and Menes also grasped a torch to be able to pursue his own way more comfortably if he did not like the direction taken by the others.

"So this is where my body, when transformed into a mummy, will some day be laid?" said the princess, with a shade of melancholy in her smile, as she gazed into the gloomy pit. "It is cool and quiet down there, my sleep will not be easily disturbed. I hope it's im-

possible for the dead to catch cold, or I should fear I might not be free from one for thousands of years."

They entered the dark gulf, which threatened to swallow up the little party and never more give them back to the light of day. The architect described with the skill of an expert the building of the chambers, halls, and corridors, remarking that the paintings were the best he had ever seen, but the torch-bearers could not go near the walls on account of the smoke, the colors were still damp. Menes' love for art awoke with passionate enthusiasm; absorbed in gazing at the glimmering pictures, which seemed to dance in the flickering light of the torches, he forgot everything else. The whole possessions of the royal family were depicted on the walls; horses, chariots, slaves, soldiers, herds, barges, fish-ponds, succeeded each other in a gay procession. In the second hall they entered they found the artist, mounted on a scaffold, putting the last touches to the head of a god. Asa-Termutis greeted him with a cordiality bordering upon deference.

"Your heart must be filled with pride," she said, as he descended from the scaffolding, "for this work of your hands will give posterity a knowledge of our life. How distinctly, quickly, and easily a picture is understood, while the written words so carefully treasured can only describe imperfectly."

"These pictures will endure," said the artist proudly, passing his hand across his lofty brow, "Your Highness gave me three hundred rooms to decorate, I have created thousands of figures by the power of my

brush, and might almost compare myself to one of the minor deities, since I, too, like them, create."

"You are much to be envied," said Menes earnestly. "You conjure up life in the abode of death, make these silent walls speak, and bring before our eyes the course of human existence from the cradle to the grave."

"Don't praise me too highly," replied the grey-haired man, with sparkling eyes, "look at the letters on yonder entablature—a hymn to the Sun—there is greater might in words than in color. Language can stir the soul far more powerfully than form; with a few words you can bring more pictures before me in a moment than I should be capable of painting in twenty years. Besides, here stands a man, the builder of this subterranean palace, who deserves as much commendation as I."

After the architect had modestly disclaimed the praises spoken by the princess, the party went on penetrating deeper and deeper into the bosom of the rocks.

"I like my tomb," said Asa-Termutis to Menes, in a tone of melancholy satisfaction, "it seems as if I were floating, a spirit that had said farewell to the light of day, through this my eternal abode. Look at these magnificent halls, mysteriously lighted by the dull glare of the torches, see how silently they succeed each other, with what mute majesty they open before us, awing us by their desolate splendor; can death appear in more pompous guise? Might we not suppose these colossal

rows of columns to be his triumphal procession? A feeling of timorous joy, a pleasant thrill of dread steals over me, when I imagine myself in my future state. To rest in these halls, separated from every living creature, to have for companions solitude and darkness, to be alone with these painted forms, one's self only a painted shape, a nothing that once was something; ha! ha!" she laughed till the echoes sent back the sound in hollow tones: "Can you fancy how I shall look as a mummy, Menes?"

Both, lost in thought, walked on, paying no farther heed to their dark path. By degrees the princess' imagination began to be stimulated by the majestic, silent gloom. The excitement, the vague oppression that assails us when we know that we are deep under the earth, took possession of her keenly susceptible mind. She wished to be grave and laughed, tried to laugh and her mirth congealed into gloom.

"When I look at these limbs, still so warm and full of vigor, a strange feeling comes over me," she continued. "Can you imagine them wrapped in grey bandages? A brown, shrivelled mummy! Strange that the ears, which now so eagerly absorb every sound, should some day be deaf, the eyes, that now pierce so far into the distance, should no longer see, even though a hundred suns were to rise before them. Oh! death is a great mystery!"

"That is why we serve him mysteriously," replied Menes, infected by the princess' unnatural mood. "It is sublime that a single human being, who is bereft of

all needs, should occupy these halls alone. It is sublime to be ruler of this solitude and honored almost more than a living person, for the dead deserve our reverence."

"Above the earth," the princess continued in her increasing excitement, "above the earth — what tumult reigns! Military pomp parades amid the resounding blare of trumpets; the king ascends his throne, proudly receiving the tribute of conquered nations; the priests burn incense before their god, the ambitious devise plans, those who thirst for gold add to their riches, the lover thinks the whole world depends on possessing one woman, the traffic is ceaseless, the noise deafening — and below the earth what stillness, what a contrast! How empty, how contemptible appears everything for which man longs and strives with so many heart-throbs. As I wander through these chambers, how distinctly the walls utter the thought: we are dancing shadows."

Menes, whose imagination now also began to be inflamed by the darkness, the dreamy silence of the place, walked faster and faster. The blood mounted to his brain and, in spite of the coolness, the perspiration trickled down his temples and his breath came quicker.

"Yes," he replied, "our waking hours often seem to me like a light dream, so that it might be said we were sleeping instead of living; our lives resemble a very coherent dream which often borders upon waking only to relapse again into the greater torpor. For, is not what we know of things very visionary in its char-

acter? Is our thinking aught save uncertain fumbling; even the clearest mind gropes in darkness."

He paused, turned, and then stopped:

"What is the matter?" asked the princess, "why are you so startled?"

"By my own words, 'gropes in darkness'" — he replied, "they reminded me that we are doing the same thing. Don't you see that, in the eagerness of our conversation, we have outstripped our companions? They are left far behind us, we must try to join them again."

When Asa-Termutis found herself separated from her train and alone with the young noble in a hall faintly lighted by his torch, she seemed to turn pale and was evidently trying to control the quickened throbbing of her bosom. Menes, too, as she perceived, felt strangely moved. His cheeks glowed, his eyes sparkled, and he trembled violently, either from the excitement of the conversation, confusion at finding himself alone with the royal maiden, or some other cause. He was obliged to fairly force himself to avert his eyes, which sometimes involuntarily lingered with a look of timid admiration upon the princess.

Asa-Termutis hurried to the entrance of the hall; Menes, with unsteady steps, followed. She sat down for a moment on the projecting base of a pillar, but rose as he approached, though it seemed difficult, for her knees visibly trembled. Her face she held steadily averted.

"I think we must pass through here," said the

young Egyptian in an anxious tone, "this is the sepulchre, I recognize it by the yellow walls; the coffin is to stand on this pedestal."

They were in a vast, pillared hall, in whose centre rose a socle. The walls, of a golden-yellow hue, were covered with paintings representing the final judgment and the bliss of the justified souls. In these pictures the dog-headed Thoth, attracted special attention by the terrible expression of countenance with which he guided the languet of the scales.

"Shout," said the princess imperiously, "call my waiting-maid Huassa, she will hear you and guide us back."

Menes did not know what to do, the change in Asa-Termutis' manner confused him and he irresolutely kept silence.

"Why don't you call?" she asked sternly, and then added: "Shout! I command you."

"Directly, Your Highness," he faltered.

As in his embarrassment he still remained silent, for he suddenly felt afraid of his own voice, the princess turned towards him. Menes saw an angry face which, however, instantly softened as soon as she perceived the youth's intense confusion; the stern words on her lips melted into more gentle and friendly language.

"Pardon me," she said, trying to smile, "I was hasty. I only meant to ask you to take me back to my companions as quickly as possible; you know the evil tongues at court, give them no food for gossip, let us join the others immediately."

Menes, holding his torch aloft, silently led the way. The princess could perceive the young man's agitation by the violent trembling of his arm. They had gone only a short distance through several rooms when they were stopped by a wall.

"Where are we?" asked Asa-Termutis in surprise. "Don't I know my own tomb? There is no corridor leading from this room, we must turn back."

"I will call," said Menes.

He now raised his voice till the echoes resounded in ghostly accents from hall to hall, but there was no reply. The princess showed no anxiety, on the contrary, a strange joyousness illumined her features; a morbid excitement suddenly took possession of her. Menes, startled, gazed with astonishment into her glowing eyes.

"My tomb loves me so much," she said laughing, "that it would fain receive me while I am alive. That is its vengeance upon the sun, the darkness will not resign us."

Her glance now rested in a sort of fierce rapture upon the young man, to whom her mood seemed more and more incomprehensible; her critical and alarming situation suddenly appeared to afford her actual pleasure.

"Oh," she cried with ghastly mirth, "I wish they would never find us, I wish they might forget us; it is cool and quiet, everything invites to complete repose; I would like to sleep here in the arms of a dear friend."

The last words aroused Menes' anxiety. The prin-

cess did not seem to heed it but, smiling strangely, laid her hand upon his arm.

"What do you think of dying down here?" she asked dreamily.

"It would be anything but pleasant," he replied, "the gloomy hour of death is somewhat cheered by the consolation of friends or at least by the light of the sun; down here in the presence of these pitiless rocks, this malignant darkness, I think it would be absolutely terrible."

He shuddered as he glanced around the huge vaulted hall, from which, like an eyeless socket, the darkness stared at him.

"Down here," he added, "madness would seize me if I were forced to wander torchless in the impenetrable gloom. A death-like chill runs through my limbs at the bare thought. No, no! let us get away quickly. My breath is failing, a cold weight oppresses my heart."

"I feel very differently," whispered the princess, sighing heavily, "I do not understand you. I would like to put out your torch, would fain have these walls draw nearer and nearer till they left a space only large enough for a coffin and then" . . . she paused, her eyes, now lustreless, were fixed vacantly on the darkness, her livid lips were half-parted as if she wanted to sip the gloom.

"Let us think of escape, Your Highness," Menes answered anxiously. "To resign life in this subterranean vault affords me less pleasure than it does you.

But wait — I have an idea, didn't the architect give you a plan of the tomb? Look for it, I remember that you put it among the folds of your dress."

"Why, how fond of life you are," replied Asa-Termutis, in a tone of bitter contempt, "do you long to see the light of the sun again? I—I hate the sun. The whole world seems to me corrupt, like foul Nile-water. What does life give me? Food, slumber, weariness. I don't want to return to the upper world, and you ought to be equally sensible! Suppose—a strange idea, isn't it?—but suppose we should stay here? It is so bright and warm above."

"Why, Princess," he cried in amazement, "what are you saying? — I beseech you to look for the plan."

"The plan?"

"Our situation is dangerous, it is the only thing that can save us."

"Ah! yes," she answered, smiling wearily, "you want to live. Pardon me, I thought you were as wise as I. Well, where shall I find the plan? — Do you really love life so much, Menes?"

"I do not love it," he said firmly, "but I should not wish to idly leave it."

"You are right! You are a man," the princess dreamily replied, "but I am a woman! And—don't you agree with me, my friend? — it is a sort of misfortune to be a woman—! I wanted—but enough—here, take the plan."

Slowly, hesitatingly, like a person in a dream, she gave him the plan, taking the torch that it might not

be in his way. Menes spread the roll out and in a few moments had examined it. He was just on the point of folding it up, when the light suddenly flickered violently. He looked up in alarm. The princess was holding the torch in both hands, swinging it to and fro, then she lowered it to the floor, pressing it close to the wall, and continued these singular proceedings with a sort of absence of mind plainly perceptible in the unnatural smile that rested upon her agitated face.

"What are you doing?" cried Menes in surprise, after watching this strange performance for some time, "the torch will go out."

She did not hear him; the expression of her eyes became wild as a maniac's, her lips murmured unintelligible sounds, her whole body began to tremble. Menes repeated his request to give him the torch; but Asa-Termutis still paid no heed, she seemed completely absorbed in her gloomy fancies. She now held the torch high aloft. Menes, perceiving the peril, sprang forward but, ere he could reach it, the princess hurled it violently on the floor. Black, impenetrable darkness followed the young man's loud outcry — the torch was extinguished. At the same moment a heavy body fell upon the floor.

"What have you done?" the young Egyptian cried despairingly, staggering against the wall as if paralyzed; "we are lost."

Without knowing what he was doing, he groped his way along to the door and here he taxed his voice to the utmost, roaring and shouting the names of the

female attendants till the walls fairly seemed to rock. The darkness was so intense that he fancied he actually felt it. He strained his eyes, until they almost started from their sockets, in trying to discover some trace of their deliverers, tore his fingers until they bled upon the stones over which he groped to find some place of egress. Again he shouted! "Help! Here!" echoed from the vaulted ceilings. These exertions soon robbed him of breath, nothing but groans escaped his lips. His thoughts darted wildly through his brain, his whole nature shrank from the fancies that arose in his mind. He called the princess by name, but received no answer and, with great difficulty, felt his way towards the spot where she had stood. His foot struck against some soft object, he stooped and accidentally seized a portion of her robe, which guided him to the head of the prostrate form. To rouse her was impossible. Once more he sought the door, feeling his way through, and at last succeeded in reaching the adjacent hall. But in these efforts he had moved away from the wall and now stood without support, surrounded by darkness. Where should he turn? With his last strength he again sent his voice through the gloom Stop! Was not that a sound from the distance? He shouted as loud as he could—yes! That was an answer! That was a human voice, and it sounded like heavenly music in the ears of the wretched man. The more distant halls reddened, steps were heard, the light approached, the lamentations of the attendants became more and more distinct, and soon the exhausted, pant-

ing youth was surrounded by the princess' terrified train. In a few gasping words he related what had happened, but took upon himself the blame for letting the torch go out. All thanked the gods for the fortunate termination of the dangerous adventure; the maids wept for joy, the men tried to conceal their emotion under jubilant exclamations. Asa-Termutis was found fainting on the floor and did not recover until she had been carried to the boat, exposed to the fresh breeze, and showered with Nile water. Menes sat at the helm absorbed in thought. The torturing question arose: Did she hurl the torch on the floor intentionally? Had her excited imagination given birth to the frenzied resolve of dying there with the man whom she secretly loved, yet could never be permitted to call her own? On reaching home the princess was borne to her room; a violent fever set in and for weeks she lay between life and death, raving wildly, her thoughts constantly dwelling upon Menes, with whom she fancied herself wandering through subterranean chambers or on the top of the pyramids. Now she was in the gayest spirits, anon extremely melancholy; sometimes she wanted to live, then she longed to die; sometimes she kissed her father and treated him very affectionately, at others pushed him away, declaring that she hated him.

CHAPTER X.

A SURPRISE.

MENES received a letter from his mother, in which she told him that she had become most fondly attached to Myrrah and that the young girl seemed to love her. Menes must wait and, if Myrrah remained faithful to him — which in the case of Jewesses it was impossible to predict — she would promote his happiness to the best of her ability. Menes kissed this letter a thousand times. He did not doubt Myrrah's faith for an instant. "But she may also rely upon mine," he said to himself, "though all the princesses in the world should love me and wish to make me king." Had he suspected what had occurred at home during his absence, he would not have pressed the missive to his lips with such tender satisfaction or so heartily congratulated himself on having left the young girl in the charge of such a mother. But the gods sit silent, the language of the air is incomprehensible to us, and no pitying breeze bears the hapless maiden's cry of anguish to the ears of him who should hear it.

To spare Asa-Termutis, Menes had represented the incident in the rock-tomb somewhat differently from

the actual facts, attributing the extinction of the torch to his own carelessness; but, on hearing of her friend's noble falsehood, the princess eagerly contradicted it. The shame she felt in having the generous-natured youth palliate her madness to the world, soon restored the full control of her shaken intellect, her pride became her salvation, she wished to show Menes that she could bear her misery; nay, from this hour she not only treated him with reserve, but even endeavored to show dislike in place of favor. So in the eyes of the court she soon became the same gay maiden as of yore, whose only trace of illness lay in the slight shade of pallor still lingering on her cheeks; her self-command even deceived her father. The king celebrated the joyful event of her recovery by first solemnly offering a great sacrifice of thanksgiving in the temple, and then arranging a hippopotamus hunt on a very grand scale. On returning from the chase at evening, greatly fatigued, the high-priest Psenophis familiarly approached him. Rameses, who suspected him of being implicated in the conspiracy, tried to ungraciously rebuff him, but the clever courtier pretended not to notice his sovereign's rudeness, and by all sorts of vague hints intimated that he had prepared a surprise for him. The king, though at first impatient, finally had his curiosity aroused and asked in what the surprise consisted. Psenophis smiled mysteriously.

"Will my lord accompany me into the park?" he enquired.

Rameses was surprised. Accompany him into the

park at night? Was this a snare? Should he suspect an ambush? He hesitated a moment and then replied:

"I have something else to do, I cannot go with you."

"You'll lose a great deal," said the priest with crafty emphasis.

"Why are you so mysterious?" asked the Pharaoh, "what are you concealing from me?"

"That which makes men happy," said the prelate ambiguously.

The king laughed.

"It is said death brings happiness."

Psenophis, with a reproachful glance, turned to retire.

"Have I deserved such suspicion?" he said. "Even though there are some faithless servants, my lord, must all be disloyal? But let us drop the subject, I see you prefer to remain here."

"Come, come," said the king soothingly, "that was not my meaning. So you intend to be inexorable and give me riddles to solve?"

"Yes, that is precisely what I mean," the priest answered gaily.

Rameses still wore his hunting-knife in his belt and, not wishing to show his distrust too plainly, he said carelessly:

"I see I must yield to your will, if I want to satisfy my curiosity. Lead the way into the park, I like adventure."

Psenophis, smiling secretly, walked on in advance.

"You will be amazed, and commend your servant's inventive talent, my royal master. You will at last perceive his deep regard for your happiness. Yes, yes, I pondered a long time over what pleasure I could give you — till at last this idea, which I know you will pronounce a good one, occurred to me."

"You make me more and more curious," replied Rameses, grasping his dagger closer as they passed various gloomy thickets, dimly illumined by the moon.

"We shall soon reach the spot," whispered Psenophis, after they had walked some time in silence.

Once it seemed to the king as though one of the myrtle bushes he was passing rustled more violently than the others. He started back. Was it the wind? Or was some living being there?

"It would be better for you to tell me your plan," said Rameses, scanning the swaying bush suspiciously.

"Permit me to keep silence, my royal master," replied the smiling priest, bowing humbly to the sovereign. "You would spoil my jest, I meant to surprise you."

"Well then, go on!" said the Pharaoh, who was gradually beginning to feel uncomfortable as they plunged deeper into the shubbery in the park. They had passed the pond, walked through the avenue of acacias, left the little obelisks behind, and were now turning into a small grove of palm-trees.

Rameses, secretly repenting his rash step, glanced

uneasily at the bushes and thickets. If three or four armed men should now attack him, he was lost.

"Where are you taking me?" he cried in an anxious, almost angry voice, and stopped.

"Do you see the white roof yonder," said Psenophis quietly, "the one rising above the tops of the palm-trees?"

"My bath-house?" asked the astonished sovereign.

"That is our destination."

They walked on; the bath-house was soon reached; their footsteps echoed mysteriously in the empty, lonely rotunda, whose pillared wall gleamed spectrally in the moonlight. The king would have preferred to turn back, his heart began to throb violently, he fancied that traitors were lurking in every corner, every shadow, yet since he had ventured so far return was impossible, he must now struggle against his increasing distrust and, in case of necessity, show royal courage. With a firm tread he followed the priest through the long, shadowy colonnades into the little anteroom.

"And what now?" asked Rameses in a loud voice, that echoed through the room as they stood in the cosy chamber.

"Do me the favor to look through that curtain into the interior of the bath-house," smiled Psenophis, "you may possibly see something not wholly unfamiliar. I hoped the unexpected sight would afford you pleasure."

"I believe you are trying to banter me, Psenophis," cried the king, stamping on the marble floor; "what

foolish prank are you playing? Am I a child? I feel inclined to go back at once."

"I beg you to first cast one glance through the curtain, my royal master," replied the high-priest, "the mystery of my conduct will then be solved."

The Pharaoh sullenly approached the chink between the hangings and pushed them a little farther apart, but had scarcely put his head in when he started back, apparently in no unpleasant surprise. What did he see there? He beheld, hanging above the emerald water in the marble basin, a dark-blue lamp whose mystical light streamed full upon a leopard-skin flung close beside the basin. On this spotted rug lay, stretched at full length, a woman whose smooth white limbs were still besprinkled with drops of water from the bath. She raised her arm, drew aside the veil that covered her face and, with a deep sigh, fixed her languishing dark eyes upon the curtain. The look pierced the king's heart like a fiery dagger; he turned pale and started back.

"Psenophis, isn't this — isn't this the Jewess from Memphis — Rebecca?" he whispered.

But Psenophis was no longer there, he had retired unobserved and in his place stood a negro slave.

The beautiful Jewess turned slightly on her couch, extending her arms as if to embrace the empty air. Rameses had been right, before his eyes lay Rebecca, the girl whose graceful movements in the dance had aroused his admiration in Memphis. The king watched her a few moments longer; had he not been bewitched

by the lovely vision, he could not have helped seeing that the fair one was probably well aware who was watching her, that every look, sigh, and gesture was skilfully studied, for Psenophis in very flattering terms had invited the girl to Thebes, hoping that she might succeed in winning the heart of the king.

Rameses made a sign to the black slave, who was waiting expectantly, and whispered that he wished to talk with Rebecca at the palace within an hour, — she was to be brought there unseen. As Rameses went back, the high-priest stepped out of the shadow of the last column.

“Is my lord angry?” asked the crafty prelate.

The king pressed his hand kindly, his distrust of the man had vanished.

But as the Pharaoh walked on, Psenophis looked after him with a smile of such crafty satisfaction, that had the monarch perceived it, his suspicions would have been still more keenly aroused. The slave took Rebecca to the palace; the royal apartments were soon opened to her and the king himself instantly appeared and engaged her in an eager conversation, which the Jewess spiced with so much wit, such subtle, mischievous coquetry, that from that evening her fate was decided. Her caprices so cheered the Pharaoh that his attendants scarcely recognized their grave sovereign, and all were grateful to the fair Jewess who understood the art of maintaining constant cheerfulness in their master's heart. Only those nearest the monarch's person shook their heads over the king's new passion.

Among them was one old servant in particular, who had noticed that at night the Jewess often received suspicious visitors, who did not quit her apartments until towards morning, and he also asserted that he had seen her leave the palace as soon as the king had retired to his own rooms. The old man told Menes of his discoveries, and the latter had Rebecca watched, but his espionage produced no positive result. The king, to whom these vague suspicions were not mentioned, visited Rebecca as constantly as ever; with her he found what he desired, rest, amusement, diversion; with her he could cast off the nimbus of royalty; here he could be a man, and the ambitious Jewess, who had gained her object, understood how to bind her royal lover in firmer chains with each passing day.

In her room, which the Pharaoh visited every evening, perched — like a party of courtiers invited to a banquet — eight or ten parrots, which could all cry: “Rameses, I love you!” as soon as the monarch entered.

She would not be refused permission to accompany the king to the chase, she danced before him, sailed with him on the Nile. At first the king's favor simply gratified her vanity, she saw in him a rich mine of gold; soon, however, her love was no longer feigned, but a genuine emotion, for Rameses was a stately prince, to whom a woman might easily lose her heart. *Urmaa-nofru-râ*, in spite of the efforts made to conceal it from her, of course soon learned that a Jewess had supplanted her in her husband's affections. Once she

forced her way into Rebecca's apartments just at the hour the dancer expected her royal lover. The queen's rage and jealousy were boundless; no Egyptian fruit-seller could have used more abusive language.

"Why do you rave so?" Rebecca answered coldly. "Why do you taunt me? Seek rather to win your husband's love as I have done, I shall not prevent you. Tell the truth: have you ever tried to bind him to you? Have you not rather used every means to repel him?"

The queen could find no answer and departed, uttering furious threats.

Rebecca had cautiously enquired into Myrrah's descent. The king knew that his father and a Jewess had had a child, but was firmly convinced that it had perished long since, though no one knew whether it was alive or dead. Rebecca, in her crafty queries, of course concealed from the king the discovery of the document in the treasure-chamber, and passed carelessly to another subject, hiding in her heart the disagreeable certainty that Myrrah was this lost princess. Her consolation was that no human being suspected the secret, and things nobody knew were the same as if they had no existence, so why did she cherish fears?

One evening Rameses paid her a visit and, wearied by exhausting cares of state, sank down upon the cushions. Rebecca, with a bewitching smile, offered him food and drink then, as he sat silent from fatigue, she took up one of the parrots and played various

pranks till at last the king could not repress a faint smile.

"My sovereign does not stay with me," said the Jewess, clasping her cool, soft arms around him, "his spirit is dwelling amid sorrowful thoughts.

"I am anxious about my daughter," he replied. "My child has recovered, it is true, yet a dark shadow still seems to hover around her. I feel that she is striving to appear more cheerful than she really is. She says very little."

"Could she have any love-secret?" said Rebecca.

"Do not jest," answered Rameses gravely. "My child is ill, physically ill."

Rebecca hastily turned from this melancholy theme to another.

"How is your wife?" she asked, laughing.

"My wife has visited me, Rebecca," answered the Pharaoh gloomily; "she showered gall and venom upon you. Urmaa never loved me, but since I have possessed your heart, she behaves as if the greatest wrong had been done her, as if she loved me as no woman ever loved before."

"I am afraid of her, my royal master," murmured Rebecca, pressing closer to Rameses' side, "she looks at me with such malignant glances. Besides, I have fancied several times that I saw her glide past my windows at night. I believe she would poison me if she could. She is plotting my destruction."

Rameses clenched his fists.

"Something must be done," he muttered. "I'll

banish them to Syria — or, perhaps the South might be better still."

Rebecca, delighted by the monarch's determination, was just murmuring: "That is the only way to save yourself and me," when a violent knocking at the door interrupted her.

"Who is disturbing me?" cried Rameses.

"Important news relating to affairs of state, which cannot be deferred," was the reply.

"There will probably be time enough for them tomorrow," Rameses answered, but opened the door, hoping to hear of important discoveries concerning the conspiracy.

"What? Ti? You? The keeper of my treasure?" he cried in astonishment. "What brings you to me?"

An uncomfortable foreboding stole over Rebecca at this name.

"It is I, my royal master," said the little man, whose keen eyes, sparkling in a sharp face, drooped timidly before the Pharaoh.

"Well? What is the matter? Why don't you speak?" asked Rameses. "Sit down, I see your knees are shaking — what has happened to my worthy Ti?"

The little man, who had dropped feebly into the chair, struggled vainly to speak, pointing meantime to the two guards who accompanied him.

"What does this mean?" cried Rameses in alarm: "Speak, I entreat you. Calm yourself, your bewilder-

ment is infecting me. Have you witnessed a meeting of the conspirators in the treasure-house? Is another arrow on its way to my breast?"

At last Ti, with great effort, gasped:

"By the great Osiris, my lord, I feel utterly crushed, I don't know how I am to tell you this. Oh, that it should happen to me! To me, who have ever been a faithful, honest servant. My honor is lost, I shall no longer dare to raise my eyes in your presence. Alas! And I had the treasure watched so carefully."

Rebecca closed her eyes and pretended to be asleep.

"I don't know how to understand your broken sentences," replied Rameses. "Calm yourself! I know your honesty, you have always done your duty; your dread of my wrath is needless, it is directed only against the disloyal."

These words soothed the agitated man and, though interrupted by frequent outbursts of grief, he reported that the treasure-house of the Son of the Sun at Memphis had been robbed.

"I miss four hundred gold rings, a casket of gems, and the gold ship, the precious legacy of your dead father, who had it made for his wife," he faltered, wringing his hands. "Here is the list."

With these words he laid the roll on the table, pointing with his finger to the missing numbers. During the explanation Rebecca found it very difficult not to wake from her simulated sleep; a burning flush crimsoned her cheeks, but she succeeded in maintaining her composure. The king bent over her.

"Did you hear the wrong that has been done me, Rebecca?" he asked.

The Jewess hastily started from her feigned slumber.

"What do you mean? Wrong? What?"

The secret she had long known was explained to her.

"What do you advise," asked the king, "what shall I do to catch the thief?"

"It is utterly impossible for any mortal to force his way into such a building," replied Rebecca, "the keeper of the treasure must be mistaken."

Ti swore that he had made no error.

"Then," said the Jewess, "but one explanation is possible."

"Well?"

"One of the guardians of the treasure was the robber, for who could steal in through such walls?"

Ti protested that it was utterly impossible for any of his watchmen to hide even the smallest grain of gold, for he made each man undress and undergo a thorough search as soon as he quitted the vault. Rebecca, controlling her embarrassment, answered that the affair was certainly extremely mysterious, — a remark that conveyed no new idea to the others. The king ordered Ti to secretly station watchmen in all parts of the building, and provide the corridor leading to the treasure-chamber with an iron trap to seize the thief if he entered. Then he comforted the miserable keeper and assured him of his continued favor. Rebecca re-

solved to write to her brother at once and positively forbid him to enter the treasure-house. She told him the minutest details of the scene she had witnessed, and begged him not to treat Myrrah too harshly, since, after all, royal blood flowed in her veins.

CHAPTER XI.

A LIFE FOR A LIFE.

A FEW days after Rebecca was reclining idly on her couch; the table still bore the remnants of a meal — half-emptied dishes and glasses filled with wine. The window was closed and a dreamy silence pervaded the apartment. Rameses had just left the room, and fatigue so weighed down her eyelids that she could scarcely shake off the torpor of approaching sleep. She saw the dying lamp flickering dimly, as if through a veil, the gay decorations on the wall floated before her half-closed eyes like wavering shadows, half a second more and her mind would have lapsed entirely into that pleasant death which we call sleep. She fixed one last, scarcely conscious glance upon the ruddy face of Isis, smiling at her from the wainscoting, but already the head began to nod, the eyes rolled so that she knew some queer dream of gods making grimaces at her was about to take possession of her mind, when — was it a delusion or reality? She fancied the wall bearing the

head of Isis shook slightly, then moved back, and at last left an opening. Rebecca was still disposed to think this appearance one of the illusions of a dream when, through the black aperture, a man entered and, as the wall again closed, advanced close to her couch. The Jewess now started from the drowsiness of sleep and sprang to her feet with a cry of terror — the figure did not melt into the air, it was no vision of her imagination. "What do you want? Who are you?" gasped the girl in mortal fright.

"What, have you already forgotten me, you little kitten?" said the new-comer. "Yet it was I who brought you to the court, founded your fortune."

Rebecca now recognized the intruder; it was the man who had introduced her to the king at Memphis, used her as a tool to ensnare the monarch's heart.

"You — Psenophis — the high-priest?" she asked. "Oh, how you frightened me! What do you want of me so late at night? You seem to be treading mysterious paths."

"Yes, my child," he answered smiling. "We must resort to strange means if we wish to gain our purpose. But let us now talk of the affair in question. You remember on what condition I brought you here, promoted your fortune?"

"Condition?" asked Rebecca.

"Yes! yes! Why! Have you forgotten already?" replied Psenophis, in a tone of mingled cordiality and craft, patting the girl's cheeks as he spoke. "Good little mouse! Didn't you promise you would be at our ser-

vice, if I would promote you from Memphis to Thebes? By my assistance you have gained what you ardently desired. One benefit deserves another, and I now claim your services; now is the time to show that you are grateful. Have not I given you, by order of the prince, two costly bracelets, that you — do you now understand?"

"Oh, God! Oh, God!" moaned Rebecca in a hollow tone, pressing her hand to her pale brow, "I never thought you were in earnest — I gave you my promise in a delusion, a dream."

"You remember now, don't you?" he replied, in the pleasant tone of a good-natured patron. "Tell me then, how far have you progressed with him? When is it to be done?"

"So you come to remind me?"

"Even so! I wanted to ask — when the powder . . ." he paused abruptly and glanced with unmistakable meaning at a goblet standing on the table.

Rebecca, pressing her clasped hands upon her bosom, gazed fixedly into vacancy.

"Well?" smiled the priest with an affectation of airy blandishment. "We, your friends, are longing for that moment. It might have been done already. You have daily opportunities. He just supped with you, you might have perhaps mixed the powder in his wine. Didn't you? What? It's a pity. Or, have you perchance. . . ."

"I have lost the powder," Rebecca stammered.

"Is that all?" replied Psenophis. "That's easily remedied. Here's another dose."

He placed before her a tiny box and, opening it, showed a few black grains.

"These, given in wine, are remarkably conducive to sleep," he added laughing. "Nay, the sleeper is so comfortable that he finds it quite needless ever to wake again. Ha! ha! A sly powder. Excellent remedy for toothache. But tell me, why do you no longer attend our meetings, we have devised many new plans. The Ethiopian prince is very anxious to see you. If you're only passably clever, he'll marry you."

A pause ensued; Rebecca stared wildly at the little box before her; Psenophis awaited her reply. At last the Jewess thrust the casket away.

"What does that mean?" asked the high-priest.

"Take it back," the girl said resolutely.

"What? Do I understand you correctly — you refuse?"

"I refuse to be your tool any longer," answered the Jewess with flashing eyes. "When you summoned me here, initiated me into the secrets of your conspiracy, I did not know Rameses, my kind master, against whom your daggers were directed. Now that I *do* know him I'll have no farther dealings with you; I renounce you and your malignant, murderous plans! Leave me! Never speak to me again of any league between us."

"Foolish girl," murmured Psenophis with ill-repressed fury, "so you mean to deceive us! Do you sup-

pose a person can be admitted to a conspiracy and then retire at any time? Whoever has once taken poison must continue to the end, if he wishes to preserve his life. You are bound to us by iron fetters, and if you rend them you will also break the thread of your own life."

"Well then!" cried Rebecca, starting up excitedly, "set to work! Kill me! Perhaps you can do so! I have learned to love the king, tenderly, ardently; I will protect his life, seek to preserve, not to destroy it. Threaten me with what you choose, you cannot force me to assail my sovereign's sacred existence."

"And suppose I tell you that, if you oppose us, you will suffer death ere the sun rises twice—our people are skilful. . . ."

"Try to kill me," replied the girl, "and I will instantly betray your whole band to the king. I will tear away the veil of mystery that has hitherto concealed you. I know you all by name—I know your place of meeting. The king shall learn what faithful servants he is supporting, nay, it is my duty to open his eyes."

"Aha! So that's what you mean to do?"

"Yes—and at once."

"At once?" replied Psenophis laughing. "Do you expect to save yourself in that way? Have you forgotten that I need only speak one word to destroy you? Who are you? A poor Jewess of doubtful reputation. Who am I? A man of high position in the government. Who will be more readily believed, I, if I accuse

you, or you, if you accuse me? Can I not give the king sure proofs that you entered into the plan to poison him? See! I take this box, rush instantly to the king's couch, tell him — are you not turning pale? And, even if the Pharaoh believed you instead of me, do you suppose, if he punishes us, you would go scot free? You, who up to this moment, have been one of us? Can he still trust you? Trust, when your hand has menaced him with death? Exile is the least punishment you will receive from him: so ask yourself once more — will you be our friend or our foe?"

Rebecca endured a severe mental struggle; it seemed as if a hand were thrusting her backward into an abyss, while another hand forcibly dragged her away.

"Answer!" cried the prelate.

The exhausted Jewess sank back upon her couch.

"Go!" murmured her quivering lips.

Psenophis, hurling a wrathful glance at the stupefied girl, withdrew through the secret door. Rebecca felt the truth of his words, but she had resolved that the king must be saved, even should it cost her own destruction. She pondered long over the matter, execrating her recklessness; for the future and the situation in which her own thoughtlessness had entangled her, now rose before her mental vision with startling distinctness. The words she had just heard cruelly roused her from the life of imagination in whose delights she had hitherto lulled herself, to plain, sober reality. Psenophis' flattering tongue had painted court life in

such brilliant hues, promised her the hand of some high official, understood so cleverly how to cover the abyss over which he wanted to lead her, excited her love of pleasure, tickled her vanity, and she, an unsuspecting woman, had entered the snare, whose meshes tightened around her limbs ere she was aware of her danger. What was a conspiracy to her? Nothing except a pungent little excitement without evil consequences, an amusing game carried on during the interval of attending to more important matters; now, for the first time, she realized that the affair might also have its serious, ay, very serious side, that the waves she had herself raised were now closing above her head; she had laughingly breathed against a cliff, not thinking that the trifling jar might hurl the whole mass of rock downward. At the conspirators' meetings she had often boasted of her influence over Rameses, devised plans that won her admirers, and she wanted to be admired, she did not trouble herself about the rest. And now—what would she give if her foot had never entered the place where the traitors forged their plans! How could she, the frivolous dancing-girl, to whom love had hitherto been merely a childish toy, have suspected that the fate of this king would touch her so closely! What malignant divinity had implanted this deep passion in her fickle heart? For the first time she keenly realized her ardent devotion to the Pharaoh, how his calm dignity had won and ennobled her mobile temperament, his grave calmness communicated itself partially to her own nature. She had believed that she could withdraw

from the conspiracy by avoiding any contact with its members, and now the gloomy power she supposed she had long since escaped, again embraced her, crying: "You are ours." What should she do? How should she escape this demon? Was it possible to snatch herself from its open jaws?

Without knowing, in her bewilderment, exactly what she was doing, she stole on tiptoe to the monarch's chamber, which was not very far from her own. Hurrying through the anterooms, whose stone floors were covered with sleeping warriors, she flitted cautiously, like the goddess of dreams, amid the arms and legs of the snoring men, and unobserved reached Rameses' apartment. He lay stretched upon his cushions in the purple glow of the lamp, a picture of manly vigor; his muscular arm had fallen; the majesty of a slumbering lion rested upon him. Rebecca's heart throbbed with emotion as she gazed at him, hastily pressed a kiss on his half-parted lips, and hurried on as if pursued by the furies of conscience. She chanced to pass Menes' sleeping-room, whose door, as she paused before it a few moments, seemed like the gate of Paradise. She felt her anxiety yield, she was saved, she had found what she sought, she now knew to whom she might venture to carry her doubts. She knocked gently and heard a stir within; cushions rustled, the frame of the couch creaked. In a few moments a voice called: "What is it?" Without answering, Rebecca glided into the room, where Menes slowly rose from his bed, staring drowsily at his visitor.

"Rebecca," he said faintly.

"Listen to me," she whispered, controlling her excitement with difficulty. "I have important information to give you about the conspiracy against the king's life."

These words instantly roused the youth; he started up, shut the door, and then, full of expectation, seated himself on his couch. Though he hated Rebecca, he knew that his sovereign loved her, a sufficient reason for treating her with respect; he offered her a chair and requested her to tell her story. Rebecca considered whether she should inform him of her whole connection with the conspiracy, but on reflection this seemed unadvisable. Her inventive talent supplied her with a means to protect herself from discovery, without concealing from Menes anything that could contribute to Rameses' safety.

"First," she said, "I must ask you to confide to no living being what I am about to tell you."

Menes promised, and Rebecca then pretended that she had accidentally overheard a conversation held between two strangers just outside of her door. She had thus obtained possession of a secret which might be of great value to the Friend of the King,—namely, the place where the conspirators met every evening.

Menes, animated by the thought of perhaps being able to render his royal master a great service, asked the location of the rendezvous, and Rebecca described it. The spot was the eastern cell of the great temple of Amon, to whose adornment Rameses had largely con-

tributed. She could describe the way exactly, for she had often visited it to attend the meetings of the king's assassins, and entreated Menes to go there the following night; he would learn all the plans of the abandoned wretches, if he could succeed in overhearing their conversation.

Menes, in a rapture of delight, clasped Rebecca's hands, eagerly expressed his gratitude, and promised to go to the appointed spot that very evening. The rosy light of dawn was already shining into the room, when Rebecca rose with a lighter heart. "Now," she said to herself, "the sword of vengeance will fall upon my base tempters so quickly that they will not have time to destroy me." After again entreating the youth not to announce this discovery to the king until he knew the abominable wretches' names and plans, but then to act swiftly and without delay, she paused thoughtfully a moment at the door.

"Have you anything else to tell me?" asked Menes.

"I—no. . . ." replied Rebecca, whose eyes were dim with tears.

"Your reward will be magnificent," said the young man, "you have rendered us a great service."

"I am not thinking of that," murmured Rebecca, "I was going to ask whether you had had any news from Memphis."

"From Memphis? Yes."

"Well? And it is . . .?"

"Good. Myrrah is happy."

"Really?" said Rebecca slowly.

"Certainly," replied Menes, whose eyes were beginning to flash.

"You must be cautious," observed the Jewess.

"Cautious? What do you mean by that?"

"I mean—your mother—dare you trust her?"

"Why do you ask so strange a question?"

"I don't know myself. Send a messenger to Memphis, *that* can do no possible harm," said the Jewess with a touch of haste.

"Needless anxiety," replied Menes with a joyous laugh. "I am grateful to you for having betrayed my relations to Myrrah to my mother, do not suppose I cherish anger against you; you meant to do evil, but the gods transformed it into good, you are the founder of our happiness."

A cloud of sadness shadowed the girl's face. She closed the door, but paused again outside.

"I ought to tell him how his expected bliss was shattered," she murmured. "I pity him! He was basely betrayed. Poor Myrrah! Poor Menes! And my brother? . . . Pshaw! What do I care for him? He is cowardly and wicked."

She walked on through the dark corridors. Her thoughts grew more and more sorrowful; she felt that by opposing the will of her murderous tempters and betraying their designs, she had, in a certain sense, thrust the dagger into her own breast. Her heart felt so light and yet so heavy! She wanted to smile and

could not help weeping. A melancholy peace pervaded her soul.

"What does it matter," she murmured, when she had reached her room, "I shall give my life for him, the King of Kings, the Son of the Sun!"

She sank sobbing on her couch, no longer able to understand her own feelings, her whole past life filled her with loathing, she would fain have fled from it.

CHAPTER XII.

PSENOPHIS' PLAN.

MENES anxiously awaited the evening. It was difficult for him not to betray what was passing in his mind when the king, while preparing for the chase, kindly accosted him, asking why his eyes sparkled with so strange a light. He hastily intimated to the royal questioner that he was on the conspirators' track, but could give no details at present.

Rameses had too much confidence in the taciturn youth to press him farther, but Menes could do nothing that day. He paced up and down the halls of the palace, talked to the soldiers, gave the slaves purposeless commissions, and then threw himself on his couch, vainly longing for sleep. The morning was spent in idleness, and the fierce heat of noon arrived. Menes rushed down to bathe in the Nile; the cool water, bor-

dered by rustling sedges, calmed his excited blood, and he paced slowly up and down the bank, pondering the bold step he had in view. Anxiety, it is true, assailed him as he thought of being alone among these base wretches, perhaps discovered by them, but the inspiring prospect of at last sifting the whole rascally conspiracy to the bottom, being a second time the king's preserver, outweighed all thoughts of peril. As, frequently loitering on his way, he returned to Thebes, he saw before him a light cloud of dust, from which gleamed glittering garments. He paused. It seemed to be the escort of some royal personage, for several soldiers marched in front. In the centre of the group swayed a litter protected by a glittering umbrella, whose gilt standard flashed in the sunlight; the black bearers were richly attired, several female attendants walked beside it, and the rear was closed by soldiers. Was it the queen who reclined within? Menes stepped behind the trunk of a sycamore-tree; the tall grass growing around entirely concealed him. The party approached and stopped close by the spot the youth had chosen for a hiding-place.

"Rest a little while," cried a voice, "Asa-Termutis is tired."

Menes saw the old servant Huassa bend over the open litter, anxiously enquiring how her mistress felt and, as the occupant turned, he recognized Asa-Termutis. The princess smiled faintly and when offered wine shook her head. The youth felt the deepest compassion for the frail figure resting on the cushions;

she seemed oppressed by the deepest melancholy, no words escaped her lips, and her brilliant jewels seemed to mock her sorrowful expression. A wave of the sick girl's hand sufficed to set the party again in motion, it floated before the young man's tear-dimmed eyes like a vision in a dream, and stopped on the bank of the Nile where Asa-Termutis, by the physicians' advice, was to bathe.

"She might be happy, wealth and power surround her," said Menes sadly, "yet joy flies from her pathway. May the gods grant that I am not the cause of her melancholy. What is the nature of love?" he thought as he walked on. "Why do I feel nothing when this fair woman gazes at me, while a glance from Myrrah thrills me like fire? Why does this royal maiden see more in me than in any other man?"

When he reached the court-yard of the palace, the king, who had returned from hunting, came towards him, accompanied by an elderly man who seemed to be his physician-in-ordinary. The latter was talking very earnestly, sometimes frowning or emphasizing his words by an impressive gesture. When he had taken leave, Rameses walked thoughtfully towards his apartments. Ere he reached the entrance he saw Menes, waited till the youth approached, and then shook his head sadly.

"My friend, my preserver," he said in great agitation, "you have saved my life — oh, if you could save this life for me also!"

"What life, my royal master?" asked Menes,

though he instantly knew whose existence was meant.

"Menes! I fear—oh! ye gods! How shall I bear it," fell in faltering accents from the king's lips, "I fear the gods will snatch her from me"

"My royal master—calm yourself—" stammered the youth with averted face.

"The physician tells me—oh, my daughter!—she is dying!"

As Rameses uttered the words his head sank on the young man's shoulder, and Menes saw a tear sparkling on the floor. But the mighty ruler yielded to his weakness only for a moment then, rousing himself, he walked slowly back to his apartments, leaving Menes in the most painful embarrassment. Fortunately the youth had not long to think of the misfortune he had unwittingly caused; evening was closing over the fields, the dangerous work awaited its performer. After resting a little he concealed about his person, to be ready for all emergencies, a dagger and a twisted rope, then with a throbbing heart turned his steps towards the temple. The city had already become quiet; the members of the various trades were resting, only from time to time the joiner's hammer was still heard. The doors and windows were opened to the cool evening breezes; the fishermen were returning from the Nile, the soldiers were hurrying to the wine-shops. The citizens were sitting on the roofs of their houses, under the swaying curtains, to enjoy the evening air or eat their milk and dates. Young girls were play-

ing ball in front of the houses, or through the windows the old people might be seen, kneeling in front of a little table, pushing the pieces on a draught-board to and fro. Menes hastily crossed the city towards its north-eastern quarter unheeding, in his excitement, the pursuits of the people, which he usually liked to watch. Soon the gigantic pylons of the Temple of Amon towered before him and his timid feet entered the fore-court of the vast structure, which lay beneath the twinkling stars like a chain of mountains. He strode from court-yard to court-yard seeking the last cell, where the nocturnal meetings of the conspirators were said to be held. It was scarcely possible to clearly distinguish any object, the spacious court-yards gleamed in the moonlight like squares of linen framed by gloomy walls, that flung their black shadows on the shimmering sand. The young man's footsteps startled two vultures from their bloody meal; in his excited mood their harsh screams seemed like a warning; he stood still several minutes until two priests, who chanced to pass, asked what he wanted. Hastily answering that he wished to repeat a prayer, he hurried on. To-day the vast colonnades through which he was compelled to pass inspired him with little awe, he did not even heed the sphinxes, he thought only of his purpose, which made him deaf and blind to everything else. Soon the last cell was found, but its door was locked, a sure sign that the hour for meeting had not arrived; besides, no voices were heard within. But how was he to effect an entrance? It was important to steal in before the

others, as discovery would otherwise be inevitable; besides, the door was too massive to allow the sound of voices to be distinctly heard outside. What was to be done? Haste was urgent, the first arrivals might appear at any moment. Stay! Perhaps this cell, like many others in the temple, was roofless. It might be possible to enter it from above. The youth, with throbbing heart, glided up a flight of steps. Yes, the roof of the cell was limited to a stone cornice six feet wide, supported by pillars, while sunbeams and moon-rays could shine freely through the central opening. But how was he to get down? Menes gazed over the edge into the space below. To hear what was said beneath would be impossible; he must reach the interior of the cell. The rope he had brought could easily be fastened to one of the projecting ornaments of the roof and, though it stretched scarcely half-way down, would reach a statue of Amon whose head was about eight feet below. Delighted with this discovery, Menes wound the rope around one of the ornaments and letting it down found that it touched the stone shoulder of the god, whose green image glimmered faintly in the starlight.

"The god will pardon this profanation," murmured Menes in an agitated tone, as his sandals first touched the head of the statue, then rested on its shoulders, glided down its arm, and finally found a firm support on its knees. From thence a single bound carried him to the stone pavement of the cell. He was now in the very centre of the conspiracy and, viewless as a spirit, could listen behind the god's back to the assassins'

shameful designs. The pillars in the cell stood motionless like trained soldiers; the stars shone through the aperture in the roof; the god's hue was as green as a lizard. A thrill of expectation made Menes tremble, his knees shook so violently that he was forced to sit down. He did not conceal his strange situation from himself. The deep silence that reigned around stirred his excited imagination; he sometimes fairly gasped for breath, the burden of darkness and expectation weighed so heavily upon his breast. Half an hour of restless anxiety had elapsed when he heard footsteps approaching along the passage. By a clever twist, he concealed the rope behind the god's head and listened. What would now be revealed to him? What plots were the god-forsaken wretches devising? He was at his destination, it had been reserved for him to be called the saviour of the kingdom, and the thought filled him with pride. The door opened; the high-priest, Psenophis, glided cautiously in. Approaching the altar, he placed on it a lamp he had brought, whose light faintly illumined the green stone statue and the pillars; then he turned towards the door and beckoned to a slave, who entered bringing several chairs which he placed in a circle. This had scarcely been done, when steps again echoed in the corridor. Menes now fully realized the peril of his position. It was to be hoped that no one would think of looking between the columns and the wall. Here the bold youth stood or rather hid, motionless as a corpse, even holding his breath as well as he could.

"Nearer, come nearer," cried Psenophis. "Ah! our queen and her illustrious son."

"Yes," replied Urmaa-nofru-râ," throwing the kerchief back from her head, "we stole from the palace. Is no one else here?"

"We seem to be the first arrivals," said Scha-em-Djam, glancing sullenly around.

"The first and the best, not the first best," replied Psenophis, trying to be witty, "but there come the others too. Enter," he called down the passage, "you needn't smother the sound of your steps. How could any spy be near, I sent all the priests away long ago."

Menes now saw several persons who were strangers to him, enter, greet those already present, and join them. Among these last arrivals was a dark-skinned youth who, as Menes learned from the words of the others, was an Ethiopian prince from Meroë. After all were seated Psenophis locked the door, brought the lamp from the altar — in doing which its light flickered over the listener's hiding-place — and put it in the centre of the group of conspirators. When the door closed, Menes felt as if it had shut him off from the world. He strained all his senses to the utmost. He must see, hear, remember; he was now in the lion's den — escape was impossible — he must stay until the traitors chose to go.

"Oh, mighty Amon-râ, who art looking down in wrath on this assembly, grant me thy protection," he prayed fervently. "If thou wilt deliver me in safety from the clutches of these wretches, I will use whatever

I have heard for the benefit of thy son, my noble king."

The confused interchange of talk between the members of the group was passing into quieter conversation, when the high-priest, the head of the council, commanded silence; the listener behind the pillar heard every syllable. Psenophis first read a list containing the names of all Rameses' foes; each person, when called, answered: "Here." No one was absent. Psenophis then spoke ably and craftily of the purpose of the whole enterprise, representing Rameses II., as an ignoble monarch who was over-partial to his friends and squandered the strength of the nation in useless wars. He closely ran over each individual point, magnifying the sovereign's trifling faults into positive giants and reducing his really noble qualities to contemptible pigmies, but with such bewildering eloquence of language that, for the moment, one was often forced to agree with him, and unable to detect the falsity of his conclusions. When he had represented, for a sufficient time, the colossus Rameses to be only a grain of sand, he closed with fiery words that called forth an eager assent from his hearers.

The conspirators then spoke in whispers so that Menes lost the commencement of the conversation.

"He can betray nothing more," said the queen, laughing, in a somewhat louder tone than the others, "my drink has silenced him forever. Thanks to that precious plant."

"You did well," replied Psenophis. "Hui might

have become dangerous to us. Very dangerous! Now we are saved from his treachery; death is a silent ally. But danger threatens us from another quarter."

"Danger? From whence?" cried the prince.

"Where is the beautiful Jewess, I don't see her?" interrupted the Ethiopian prince. "She no longer attends our meetings."

"It is from her that the peril threatens us," said Psenophis.

"What? From her? Impossible?" exclaimed the Ethiopian, "she loves me, she is faithfully devoted to us."

"She loves the *king*," said Psenophis, with a crafty side glance at the queen, who winced at the words, "loves him fervently; she defied me with great boldness, and positively refuses to kill him."

"Then we will kill *her*," gasped Urmaa-nofru-râ.

"The reckless girl is in a position to deliver us all to the executioner's axe," continued Psenophis, "the king is very fond of her; for my part I believe that, even if he should learn that she belonged to our league, he would pardon her. The danger is hourly increasing, nothing but speedy action can save us from destruction."

"I'll take it upon myself to silence this Jewess," said the queen with a sullen frown, "not only my reason, but my heart is concerned in the deed. She has robbed me of my husband, that alone merits death. Do not smile at my jealousy, Priest, but let me have my way. I shall succeed in giving her poison when

she least expects it. I know a plant which, if burned in a room, produces sleep. After I have once stupefied her, it will be easy for me to make her sleep forever."

"I am far from sneering at your righteous indignation," replied the high-priest, "your vengeance is just, I myself advise silencing the dancing-girl as soon as possible, one word from her will be sufficient to destroy us all."

The high-priest saw with satisfaction the flush of rage that crimsoned the cheeks of the jealous queen.

"I think," the prince now said hoarsely, "that above all things we ought no longer to permit a young, inexperienced stranger from Memphis, a mere boy like this Menes, to strengthen himself in the king's favor. It is this dreamer who has made it impossible to deal a blow at Rameses for, in spite of his inexperience and visionary inaction, his dog-like fidelity teaches him to be watchful. In my opinion he ought to be the first one to quit the world."

All agreed with the prince. Menes, in his hiding-place, shuddered as he perceived that he was the object of universal hatred, for the most violent gestures of rage accompanied each mention of his name; he knew that if he fell into the power of these men no escape would be possible. They fairly lacerated him with their tongues, he felt as though a troop of hungry jackals had fallen upon his body when he heard these hideous imprecations.

"The king would long ago have been a withered

mummy in his tomb," cried Psenophis, in a voice that rose above all the others, "if this taciturn fanatic had not constantly thwarted our plans. The prince is right; we must rid ourselves of him first of all."

"To-morrow," said Urmaa resolutely, "I will force my way into his room with three slaves, have him thrown into a sack, bound, and. . . ."

"No, dear mother," replied her son, "I have devised a better, craftier plan, which will attract less attention and more fully satisfy my vengeance. I will invite him most cordially to visit my palace half a league south of Thebes. There I will show him a cage I have ostensibly had built for a hippopotamus. I'll open the iron door to let him look in and, at this moment, two slaves, who have previously received their instructions, must push him inside, where he can be left to starve. No human being will suspect what has become of him, for in the mountain on which my palace stands is a ravine over which the cage hangs and where it will finally fall. This punishment may be cruel, but it is just."

All eagerly assented to his words. Spite of the icy chill that made every limb tremble, a feeling of defiance rose in Menes' breast as he heard this horrible plot.

"You shall atone for this," he muttered, grinding his teeth, "you shall see how the visionary avenges himself. Beware! You have built your cage for yourself, monster! The sword of the avenging goddess, a dark doom, is already hovering invisibly over your heads."

Absorbed in these reflections, he entirely forgot his dangerous situation until unpleasantly reminded of it by an unexpected occurrence. The high-priest suddenly rose with every sign of alarm.

"What is that?" he cried, interrupting the eager speakers, "be quiet a moment."

All were silent.

Menes felt as if he were losing his senses. In his wrath he had stamped his foot loudly on the stone pavement.

"What? Why? Where?" was asked.

"I thought I heard a shuffling sound," replied the high-priest, looking about him.

"It is the lamp or the wind," said one.

"You were mistaken," another added.

Psenophis raised the lamp and hastily cast its light around the cell, then set it down again and admitted that he had been deceived. Menes breathed more freely, straightened himself, and uttered a silent prayer to the gods, who had prevented the lamp-light from reaching him. The assembled traitors now discussed the best means of removing the king, whether by an open attack on his life or a secret surprise. The Ethiopian promised the assistance of his soldiers, the Vicegerent Ani was already in Meroë collecting troops. The queen advised poisoning, Scha-em-Djam wanted the sword or dagger to be used. There was a long discussion, the various partisans became excited, the wordy war grew more and more eager, and Menes listened with a feeling of the deepest loathing, the bitterest indignation. Often,

in his noble wrath, he forgot himself so far as to mutter angry words which were fortunately unheard in the fierce tumult of voices, often he was on the point of recklessly advancing to utter an imperious command. At last, when every face was flushed with the ardor of the fray, and the traitors' eyes were flashing fiercely, Psenophis, smiling coldly, rose from his seat.

"You are fools!" he exclaimed in such thundering tones that the disputants were silenced. "Fools to quarrel among yourselves in a cause where only the most complete harmony can lead to our end. Listen to me. I have devised a plan which will amaze you all by its craft, and before whose profound atrocity malice itself ought to be silent in shame. The suggestions I have heard from you will only serve to rouse the fury of the nation against us as the plotters, the criminals, my proposal, on the contrary, will not only direct suspicion from us, but utterly crush it, because — because the Nile will be the culprit."

"The Nile?" echoed in questioning tones around the circle.

"Yes, the Nile," replied Psenophis smiling, "the sacred river will become our ally in destroying this unworthy king, who protects the corrupt Hebrew brood, curbs the power of the priests, betrays his wife, and bestows his confidence on strangers. Hear what I mean to do. In order to escape the heat of the sun, when entertainments are given, I have had a subterranean room built adjacent to the great Nile-canal in the northern part of the city; these underground halls

are not uncommon, you know, many rich men own them and often spend whole months there when they are unable to bear the heat well or sleep deserts their couches. I will invite the king to a nocturnal banquet in this hall. But I have had the Nile-canal — the work will be completed in a few days — conducted so close to the right wall of this subterranean apartment that the opening of a few bolts and spigots will suffice to let the mass of water rush into the hall, and from such a height that the architect says the whole room will be filled to the ceiling with surging waves before you can count three. The invited guests, sitting over their wine, will scarcely be aware of their danger before they are floating about as corpses in the hall so suddenly transformed into a sea. In this way the king's death can simply be ascribed to accident — the wall of the room could not bear the pressure of the water in the canal. No human being is to blame for the mischance — it will be the fault of the Nile."

When he paused, glancing around him with the mien of a triumphant conqueror, silence reigned in the assembly for a few minutes. An uncomfortable feeling, a humiliating dismay, stole over the listeners — they recognized in the shaven priest their master. Several cast glances of secret rage and envy at the smooth skull so loftily erect, as if a royal crown were simply its due. Then all dejectedly assented. The plan was to be executed in six days; according to Psenophis' statement the subterranean work, the digging of the side-canal, could not be completed sooner. After deciding a few

more points and swearing mutual fidelity, the conspirators dispersed. Psenophis assumed so patronizing an air when they parted, that Scha-em-Djam glanced suspiciously at him, but as the high-priest whispered: "when shall we be permitted to call you the Son of the Sun?" the prince's gloomy features brightened with a disagreeable smile.

"In six days, I hope," he murmured.

"I hope so too," replied Psenophis, "and shall I be sure of your favor?"

Scha-em-Djam's only answer was a gracious clasp of the hand — meantime every one had left the room; Menes was alone, rescued from the traitorous pack, and with a sigh of relief he emerged from his hiding-place. So this was the dark plot that menaced the king? In this treacherous fashion his death was to be compassed? He shook his clenched fist at the door and vowed the most savage vengeance on the whole party.

"I'll go to the king at once," he said to himself, "and name every individual. A detachment of soldiers shall be sent to arrest each one of them, and they must then be publicly executed before the eyes of the people without delay, trial, or examination!" He was glowing with feverish excitement and pressed both hands upon his head to quell the fierce pulsations his indignant heart sent to his brain, the wild thoughts that seethed in his burning head. The hour for action had arrived. Away from this scene of crime, he must hasten to the king, rouse him from his sleep. Not a minute must be lost in revealing the knavish trick. Menes forced

down his excitement, swung himself upon the pedestal of the statue, and had just seized the rope when he heard footsteps approaching along the corridor. What should he do? Leap down? Hide himself again? He listened. Perhaps the steps might pass. No, they paused before the door. The lock creaked with a hollow sound. Oh, ye gods! They had forgotten to take away the lamp and had come back for it. He must kick it over and extinguish it. His foot reached it and it lay shattered on the floor, but the wick still burned dimly in the flowing oil. Menes darted behind the statue; too late—the door opened.

“What’s that?” he heard Psenophis’ gasping voice shout. “Here! Some one has been here, we have been watched.”

Distant voices answered. The wick on the floor twisted over and went out. Poor Menes’ senses failed him.

“Here! Here!” resounded through the corridors. The conspirators, who had scarcely gone, noisily returned and gazed timidly into the dark room.

“I saw him by the lamp-light,” the high-priest protested.

“Impossible!” exclaimed the queen.

“It was he! It was Menes! He has concealed himself.”

“Who threw the lamp on the floor?” cried a chorus of voices.

“He! He did it, to save himself,” replied the priest, trembling violently.

"You are dreaming," echoed in various tones.

"He is here; don't you see the rope hanging from the roof?" Psenophis suddenly cried exultantly.

"By the gods! That *is* a rope."

"He is right, we have been watched. Follow me, and we'll find out at once."

The prince rushed into the dark room, but stumbled over the lamp and cried wrathfully: "Who is here!"

"Fool! of course he will answer," jeered Urmaa.

Scha-em-Djam reached the statue, shrieked, and retreated with a bleeding arm.

"I was stabbed by a dagger," he groaned, holding his arm.

"The secret is out," cried Psenophis, "who'll follow me behind the statue?"

Some of the conspirators seized their daggers and reluctantly advanced; Menes summoned all his courage, despair lent him a giant's strength. No expedient remained except to rush like a raging lion into the midst of the bewildered traitors, and thus force his way out by taking them by surprise. Vain! He was seized. Two blows from his dagger set him free. He ran back, sprang on the pedestal, and swung himself upward by the rope. He had already reached the edge of the roof and thought himself safe, when he felt some one seize his foot and, amid laughter and shouts of triumph, he was dragged down again.

"Ho! ho!" roared the prince, "the chase is over, the stag is caught."

"Cut off the spy's ears," shrieked the others.

“No! Have you forgotten my cage?” said the prince laughing, “the strange beast belongs there.”

“See how it bites, rolls its eyes, and uses its fists. Will you betray us to the king now?” furious voices shrieked around the prostrate form.

Menes felt as if he were sinking into the sea. There was a rushing sound in his ears, flickering shapes danced before his eyes; the thoughts that he had forfeited his life; that he must leave Myrrah alone in the world, that he would be unable to save the king, darted like lightning through his brain, then complete unconsciousness followed his exertions and excitement.

CHAPTER XIII.

DELIVERED BY DEATH.

WE will return to Memphis and Myrrah. Her ardent lover kept her in strict custody, but had never appeared in her presence since the moment she had flashed her dagger at his heart. So the hapless girl lived in a state of perpetual anxiety, for as soon as she heard footsteps outside of her door, she expected to see the persistent Isaac enter. And could she always defend herself against him? Suppose he should wrench the dagger away? Suppose he should use force! She might expect anything from him. She had often pressed the blade of the dagger to her own breast, each day she

resolved to die, each night she said: "This must be the last;" but the thought of Menes always made her lower the arm she had raised to deal the blow. A tiny spark of hope still gleamed even in this darkened soul, for might not Menes suddenly appear before her? Or, might not Isaac, touched by her steadfast resolution, desist from his persecution?

One evening Hadsa, the Ethiopian female slave Isaac had given her, entered her room.

"Oh, my dear mistress," she cried wildly.

"What news do you bring," replied Myrrah in terror, "you look so frightened. Speak! Have you any evil tidings?"

"I ought to keep silence — if he should hear me — it would cost me my life," faltered Hadsa, anxiously closing the door.

"But I know you love me, Hadsa," said the captive, "often during this shameful bondage you have cheered me and lightened many a weary hour by your prattle — you will tell your mistress what threatens her? Has Isaac determined — oh, speak! — you guess . . ."

Hadsa, whose devotion to Myrrah during her imprisonment had been very great and who had rendered the helpless girl many a little service, fell upon her knees and, weeping bitterly, embraced her young mistress.

"Speak, my good girl, has he resolved to kill me?" asked Myrrah, prepared to hear the worst.

Hadsa, shaking her black head sorrowfully, pressed the girl's fair hands to her dark bosom.

"Don't torture me, Hadsa," murmured the young Jewess, "speak! What has been decided?"

The negress averted her head.

"They are going," she now said slowly, "they are going to — drug you."

"What? What are they going to do?"

"Drug you — put you to sleep . . ."

"You are dreaming — I don't understand you — or you don't choose the right words."

"I'm not dreaming! I overheard them! Oh, my mistress, my poor mistress, Menes is shamefully betrayed. You have told me so often how dearly you love him, that he alone still binds you to this miserable life, and now they want to steal from him by craft — what you so bravely guarded. Oh! I, too, know what love is, and I would rather kill myself than break faith with my lover, though he is only a poor slave."

"But I don't understand what you mean, Hadsa," cried Myrrah trembling. "What is Isaac going to do? Explain his plan clearly."

Hadsa, panting for breath in her haste, now repeated what she had overheard Isaac say to an old woman who was brewing a sleeping-potion for him. This draught, she told him, he must mix with the young girl's wine, and she would then offer no resistance to his wishes, upon which Isaac paid the old woman a large sum. Myrrah at last comprehended the full atrocity of the plan. Yet, was it possible!

Could any human soul so degrade itself? Compared with such a deed, was not murder an honest, honorable action? What an abyss of horror yawned before her! She shuddered: loathing, indignation, unutterable grief rent her heart; thoughts of a bloody revenge rose like the visions of madness before her mind. She sat mute and rigid on her couch, no friend, no deliverer near save her dagger. On its hilt her dull eyes rested, to it the desperate girl clung as her last consolation.

“Oh, he *shall* find me asleep, the base wretch, sound asleep, and very silent, fair, and patient,” she murmured over and over again with a strange smile, when the Ethiopian had gone, startled by a sudden noise which made her fear discovery. So Myrrah sat, more dead than alive. Sometimes she mechanically raised the dagger, then let it fall again, as if it were made of lead. A slave entered to put the supper on the table; she did not stir. There stood the fatal goblet containing the sleeping draught. She gazed rigidly at it; it expanded before her eyes till it assumed Isaac's features. In an outburst of rage she seized the cup and hurled it on the floor then, utterly exhausted in body and mind, sank back upon her couch, patiently awaiting the moment when Isaac would enter expecting to find her in a deep slumber. One thought that distorted her features with a horrible smile was: Pretend to be asleep and, when he clasps you in his embrace, drive the dagger into his heart. She clutched the steel so firmly that she did not notice how it cut her fingers, till drop by drop her blood fell on the floor; this trick-

ling sound was the only noise to be heard in the room. Night had closed in. The full moon rose above the sycamores in the garden, often an emerald-green beetle buzzed heavily into the room over the head of the recumbent figure; sometimes a light breeze ruffled her loosened hair. Minute after minute elapsed, still Isaac's step was not heard. It grew more and more silent, darker and darker around the lonely girl. There — was not that a knock? A hand tapped softly. No! the door opened. Was it the scoundrel? Did he suppose her asleep? Myrrah pressed her trembling hand on her throbbing heart — now the opening of the door widened. — Myrrah did not venture to look that way. But the footsteps were not those of a man. A soft hand rested on her shoulder; was he going to embrace her? She seized the dagger, ready to deal the fatal blow.

“Mistress,” whispered a voice by her side, “dear Mistress, listen to me.”

The tortured girl looked up and saw Hadsa's black face.

“Is he coming?” she moaned.

“Listen to me, Mistress,” replied the slave, “I have found a way to save you — perhaps forever.”

“What? Save? Oh! you dear, faithful soul, speak — But you are deceiving yourself; my God has abandoned me, I can be saved, yes — by death alone.”

“No, dear Mistress, don't lose courage, you still have faithful friends,” replied the servant, “you know I have charge of locking your room. Well — I have

determined, in spite of any punishment that may threaten me, to let you escape from the chamber, and have discovered how to open the door of the house. If you wish, I will fly with you."

Myrrah's face brightened at the thought of flight.

"But have you forgotten the watchmen who surround the mansion," she said. "Your plan cannot be executed, for how can we pass the guards?"

Hadsa, with breathless haste, now explained to her mistress the following daring plan. The female slave Petafa had died the day before; — it was supposed that she had drowned herself from grief for unrequited love — and was now lying on her bier in a stable behind the house, from which she was to be carried that night to Memphis to be embalmed.

Hadsa's advice was that Myrrah should lie down on the bier in the place of Petafa's body; the bearers would then ignorantly convey the living woman beyond the walls of her prison, for even if they should lift the sheet with which the corpse was covered, it was scarcely to be supposed that they would discover their mistake in the darkness of the night. When Hadsa finished her explanation she expected that Myrrah would object to undertaking so perilous and horrible an adventure, but what were danger and horror to the wretched girl at this moment? She feared but one peril, beside which all others seemed insignificant — the appearance of Isaac. Only let her escape from here, cried a voice in her heart, no matter in what way, so she instantly assented to this strange mode of flight,

may even throw her arms around the negress' neck, promising her large rewards. The two women now stole on tiptoe through the silent corridors of the house. Hadsa cautiously pushed back the bolt of the outer door, listened to discover whether any one had heard their footsteps, then hastily lighted a small lantern and guided Myrrah across the court-yard to the stable. They entered with hesitation. The room was not large. Over a bier hung a shapeless piece of wet sail-cloth, beneath whose dripping folds a human face appeared, smiling horribly as if in mockery. Myrrah, in spite of her determination, shuddered and shrank back as the hapless girl's dripping hair touched her and she saw the glassy eyes staring fixedly into vacancy. But she summoned all her courage. The deed must be done. With Hadsa's assistance, the body was lifted from the bier and concealed in an old chest that stood in the right-hand corner of the stable. Myrrah's pluck had sustained her up to this point, but now, when she was to stretch herself upon the bier, where the chill of death still lingered, she shivered violently and cowered trembling away.

"I cannot," she moaned, "the cloth is so wet and smells so horribly. • Oh, Hadsa, what shall I do?"

Hadsa, without saying a word, lay down upon the bier, drew the cloth over her and, after having remained there awhile, protested that it was only the idea of it that was so horrible. Then she rose and tried to give new courage to Myrrah, who was weeping bitterly.

"I will do it for his sake," the girl said at last, calming herself, "what would I not do to be united to Menes? Yes, Hadsa, you are right. There is no other way, I must conquer my loathing, my horror. And after all, what is this terrible situation compared to the other danger which threatens me?"

She had scarcely finished speaking when steps approached the stable, so there was no time for hesitation. Sighing deeply, she threw herself upon the bier and the Ethiopian hastily drew the sail-cloth over her body.

"Who's there?" said a harsh voice at the door. Several men, carrying torches, entered.

"What are you doing here with the corpse, you black goat?" cried one of the slaves.

"I — I only wanted to see the poor thing once more," stammered the frightened Hadsa. "We were friends, you know."

"Yes, yes," said the man.

"But make haste," continued the shrewd Ethiopian as she left the room. "The body is already beginning to decay. It would be wise to take it to Hotep, the embalmer, immediately."

"I'll attend to it," Myrrah heard one of the men reply, and at the same time felt herself raised from the floor. Directly after she perceived by the regular swaying movement of the bier that the bearers were moving. Her only fear was that one of them might lift the cloth, and she dared not dwell upon the consequences that might then threaten her. Clinging convulsively to the cross-pieces of the bier and firmly

closing her eyes, she held her breath and tried to keep up her courage. The drops of cold water from the wet cover trickled down her neck; the movements of the bearers were often so uneven that she was afraid of being thrown out, but when she heard the men pass through the gate into the road, her heart grew lighter. Opening her eyes she saw the grey cloth; but succeeded unperceived in turning her head towards the right, where a slit in the covering afforded her a view of the moonlit landscape, and enabled her to breathe more freely. After proceeding a short distance the bearers put down the bier, and one of the tired men seated himself on the narrow space left vacant beside the girl's body. She fancied every moment that he must hear her breathe, and suffered unutterable anxiety. But her torture reached its height when she was forced to listen to the following conversation.

"Why did she drown herself?" one of the party asked.

"For love, they say," replied another.

"Was she pretty?" asked the fourth bearer.

"Don't know."

"Wait, I can see her through this hole in the cloth — no, it's her hair."

Myrrah thought the time for her discovery had arrived; she was on the verge of fainting.

"Let the cloth lie," she now heard some one say, "I can't bear to look dead people in the face; their eyes haunt you for days and their mouths stand open as if they wanted to swallow you."

Myrrah felt the cloth drawn slightly aside. The poor girl's situation became more and more perilous, she was forced to use almost superhuman strength to repress a convulsive shudder, which would undoubtedly have betrayed her; she could scarcely retain her motionless position.

"By all the lions of Lybia, she was a beauty," said a voice by her side, "her shoulder is magnificent, white as the desert in the moonlight."

"You are falling in love with the charms of a corpse, you monster, and want to toy with death. Fie!" replied another.

All laughed, and the man sitting on the bier struck Myrrah on the shoulder with the palm of his hand. Fortunately despair had sent all the blood back to the girl's heart, so that her limbs were as cold as those of a corpse, and fright so paralyzed her as to throw her into a state of deathlike unconsciousness, from which she did not rally until the danger was over. At last, at last, after her ears had been offended by many a coarse jest, and she almost believed she could endure the strain no longer, that she must shriek aloud or the violent effort to conceal her agitation would destroy her, the bearers raised the bier and moved on. She soon heard the men's sandals echo on pavement, they had reached Memphis. In a short time they stopped before a house, bargained with a man who came out and, as the girl plainly perceived, carried the bier into a large building, where the process of embalming was carried on. She now heard the departing men tell the

paraschites that the body was to be embalmed in the plainest, cheapest way, and agree upon a price, then, as their footsteps died away, she burst into convulsive weeping, which she was unable to subdue until after many long and futile struggles. When she raised the sail-cloth pall she was so weak that she could scarcely stand, and yet she was obliged to fly, fly as fast as possible, since the embalmers began their unclean work at a very early hour. She forced back her tears, checked her sobs, and hurried towards the door of the dark building, through whose glass windows the dim moonlight entered the hall. Groping her way onward, she touched a cold, damp, smooth object — what was it? She drew back her hand in terror, and saw by the feeble moonbeams that she had accidentally laid it on the mouth of a corpse. She now perceived that she was the only living being among six dead bodies awaiting embalming; all around her lay the silent sleepers, yonder a richly-dressed figure in a half-finished coffin, redolent of wine and Arabian balsam; here a poor woman whose body was already half filled with myrrh and her arms wrapped in bandages. Vessels filled with nitric acid or resin stood about, and masks, byssus bandages, knives and tools used in the sorrowful work carried on here, hung on the walls. The poor girl, apparently abandoned by gods and men, shuddered as her eyes wandered over this mute company; it seemed as if the brown mummy she had just touched would rise and call her to account. Like a hunted gazelle she fled from the house into the street, and darted

down to the Nile to hide among the rushes till she could find a ship that would take her to Thebes. While hurrying on, it often seemed as if she heard behind her in the distance the shouts and exclamations of a throng of pursuers.

CHAPTER XIV.

CAGED.

WE left Menes in the hands of his captors. When he recovered from his swoon, he found himself in a room or rather a cage in which he could scarcely stand erect and whose walls he could touch with his outstretched arms. Where was he? The terrible certainty that the shameless prince had verified his threat and gratified his thirst for revenge by having him cast into this horrible prison, made his blood run cold. Had he not, spite of his stupor, felt people thrusting him into this box? Did not the scornful words of his malignant foe still ring in his ears? Ay, these walls were no visions of a disordered fancy, they could be felt, they resisted; he had become the victim of a base revenge; the feeling of mental disquiet that seizes upon us when we find ourselves in an oppressively narrow space that prevents free motion, came upon him with such power that, in an outburst of despair, he beat the floor and roof of the box till his fists were sore, but the cruel

walls jeeringly echoed back his stamping, his low moans of agony, and emitted a metallic jarring and humming which sounded to the poor captive like the gibing laughter of his enemies. To die? cried a voice in his breast, alternately heaving with contending emotions, to die is nothing. But to perish in this way or, far worse, be compelled to drag out my whole life crouching in this den! Oh, human malice, thy inventive power surpasses the bloodthirstiness of the brutes. He often fancied the frenzy of despair must lend him power to crush out the bottom of the cage and, after striving in vain, sank feebly down, staring dully and indifferently at the iron plates which rose before him with such pitiless firmness.

Oh, if his friends only knew how base a crime had been perpetrated upon him! Yet why should they not? He did not understand how they could be ignorant of it, it seemed as if they must have learned it long before, and nothing but want of sympathy kept them from aiding him. Misery lent distorted, unnatural proportions to his thoughts. Even the most trivial feeling swelled to gigantic importance; ideas darted through his brain, rending and tearing his heart like a pack of hounds let loose on the quarry. Was he actually imprisoned? Impossible! He was merely dreaming. He rubbed his eyes and stared at his hands, took a few steps through the narrow space, threw himself down in one corner and pressed his head firmly with both hands between his knees, for he felt as if his skull would burst. Then madness rose before him in the guise of a huge

blood-red spectre with a hideous smile. He closed his eyes — “hence! hence! ye visions, what do ye seek here!”

Everything was so still. He uttered a shriek that echoed a long time in tremulous cadences from the metal walls. Vain! The feverish oppression rested with leaden weight upon his brow, his breath whistled as it escaped in hurried gasps from his tortured breast; he felt as if his blood-shot eyes were starting from under their lids. At last he forced himself to be calm. You must! What avails this excitement! Compose yourself, quiet the heart throbbing in your bursting breast. Struggle like a dwarf with the giant madness, he must succumb.

He chanced to think of repeating passages from the sacred writings, and this declaiming of noble maxims, profound wisdom, somewhat soothed him. Myrrah's image rose before his mind. For a moment he entirely forgot where he was; his heart swelled; a rapture of pleasurable melancholy thrilled him; he wept. Oh! what a relief those tears bestowed; they inspired him with lofty composure and his dreary dungeon seemed like his grave, where he had been laid to sleep and dream. Gradually this submissive repose merged into sleep which, though disturbed by wild dreams, was nevertheless slumber, a sweet delusion, a fraud the tortured mind creates for itself. Ah, but those dreams! He felt even in his sleep that he was dreaming. Does malicious fate even steal into our slumbers to torment us? With a groan Menes awoke. Day had now

dawned, and he could see more distinctly the holes pierced in the walls of the cage to admit light and air. But what was this? Surely there had been six holes the day before, and now there were only five. And beside him stood a bowl of water and a little bread. How came they there? No movable opening was to be seen. His dungeon began to seem mysterious. "If food is brought to me," he reflected, "some human being must approach my prison, so at any rate I can communicate with the bearer of the bread as soon as he approaches the wall. Perhaps, if I promise this man a large reward, he will have more compassion than his master and open a way of escape.

Menes drank a little water, but he could not eat. The day passed in cheerless resignation; he felt the paralyzing influence this dreary inaction exerted upon mind and body. To this was added a complete exhaustion of strength which made drops of perspiration, hot and cold by turns, ooze from every pore. He told himself that, unless some change of situation speedily occurred, his mind would be utterly darkened, for already he was no longer master of his thoughts, already dark, ghostly shadows began to rise before his mental vision. He frequently surprised himself in following senseless ideas, illogical trains of thought, and often felt as if he ought to fear himself. When he looked around his cage, he frequently had burning sensations as if fiery sparks were being showered on his back, but he struggled manfully against this destructive feeling of dread. Evening came, and he forced himself to keep

awake to discover the secret of how his bread was supplied. Towards midnight he heard a low jingling sound and hastily stretched his hands towards the spot from which the noise seemed to come. Notwithstanding the total darkness he perceived that a small door was opened, through which a hand pushed bread and a bowl of water into the cage.

“Mercy! Mercy!” he cried, straining his voice to the utmost, “save me, whoever you may be; your reward shall be enormous.”

The door closed; they would not hear him. At the same time all the corners of the cage rattled as if an earthquake had shaken it. What did that mean? The incident robbed the luckless youth of all strength to shout again. He waited despairingly for morning; but when the first ray of sunshine streamed into his coffin a terrible discovery confronted him, he noticed that only four of the five air-holes, that had given him light the day before, still remained and — a still more appalling revelation — his dungeon had contracted two feet in every direction. What a horrible suspicion arose in his mind! He stared with fixed eyes around the walls and burst into tears of rage. All was clear. He could not conceal from himself that these barbarous iron walls, set in motion from without by some mechanism devised by the refinement of malice, were daily contracting. The mysterious creaking he had heard was the movement, the rolling of the murderous machine; he was to be mangled alive. Food was only given him to support existence in his living tomb. What a prospect!

He was aware, and had long known, that his enemies wanted to kill him, but never before had he ventured to suppose that human beings would take such bestial delight in human torture. From what an evil brain must this plan have emanated; if there were gods, how could they permit such monstrous deeds? His thoughts again began to grow confused, until at last he was no longer capable of forming an idea or clearly realizing any emotion. His mind was crushed by the idea of this pitiful, unprecedented mode of death, his soul writhed like a trampled worm under the tread of the iron necessity: to bear, to suffer. "And I must submit to this, must mutely endure it," often fell in dreamy accents from his pallid lips. In lucid moments he cursed everything that breathed and even railed against the gods — they seemed to him mere hollow masks, carved by men. He turned from a world in which such things could happen. Nay, he only remembered Myrrah as a delusive, airy vision, a sweet melody that had died away; he began to doubt whether she did not perhaps owe her existence solely to his excited imagination. In a dull stupor of dread he waited for the coming night, which was to narrow his prison a few feet more, make it still more coffinlike. When, during the night, the roof sank so low that, even while sitting, he touched it with his head and could scarcely stretch out both arms, he longed for unconsciousness. He would have embraced as a friend any one who had given him a sleeping-potion, and moaned for forgetfulness. If he could only have killed himself, but he possessed no weapons. Why cannot a

man say: "I will die!" and fall lifeless on the ground. Why is he condemned to live? The gods heartlessly bind him to this existence; he is born to experience the agonies of death, to have the certainty of it before his eyes.

When the bread was pushed in, Menes had shouted again — as vainly as the first time. Now the second night was slowly approaching, one more and he would be crushed. Oh, if it had only come! The confined prison grew darker. The forsaken captive, victim of a cruelty worse than that of the beasts, lay on the floor with his head drooping inertly. It is easy for the sage to die nobly when death approaches swiftly in a beautiful, human guise, but here? Who, in this oppressive coffin, could prepare with dignity for the terrors of the grave? Yet, the nearer the awful hour approached, the calmer Menes became. It would soon be over. Life had lost every charm, and stood before him like a haggard, half-starved slave, who is dismissed with a wave of the hand. He patiently awaited the metallic tinkling of the cage as it contracted two feet more around him, only sometimes a wild emotion seized upon him, making him feel as if he must burst the iron plates asunder to get air. But he conquered these outbreaks of despair by uttering aloud words of consolation, counsel, and reproof. He wished to die a worthy death. After all, he was perishing in the fulfilment of the most sacred duty to his sovereign. The thought aroused his enthusiasm, he seemed to himself a nobler man, an expression of lofty resignation rested on his wan features.

Had not the moment of agony arrived? Were not the planks creaking? Bracing his elbows against the sides of the cage, he listened submissively. Minute after minute elapsed; the air-hole grew dim, night had closed in. "Poor Rameses, thy fate will be even worse than mine," he murmured once, sighing heavily, then a dull slumber stole over him. A faint creaking was audible, Menes started, gasping for breath, turning his eyes in horror towards the walls of his dungeon, for the last moment was now approaching. "Oh, ye gods!" cried the poor captive, "aid me!" A hollow roar, followed by a loud report, fell with a deafening noise upon his ears; he felt the sides approaching, the top sinking. "Mercy," he shrieked in the delusion that the hard-hearted machinist would hear him. Then his senses happily failed, and he only had a vague idea that the falling roof had struck him on the temple and the whole apparatus was sinking with him into some gulf. An ear-splitting din of breaking chains, pulleys, and bars, robbed him of the last remnant of consciousness.

CHAPTER XV.

A SUBTERRANEAN BANQUET.

MEANWHILE the high-priest's residence showed an unusual bustle, an unwonted show of luxury. The house, usually so dark and gloomy, was now lighted

throughout the night; the glow of countless lamps streamed from doors and windows, its stillness gave place to eager activity; slaves glided over the stairs, vanished in the cellars, emerged from behind the hangings, carrying dishes and goblets, arranging chairs, dragging cushions. Others were giving directions, while in the distant kitchen it smoked, cracked, snapped and sputtered like a mine. Through the flitting waiters, bakers carrying bread, perspiring cooks, and wine-bespattered cup-bearers, Psenophis, adorned with a spotted leopard skin, walked majestically in full priestly array. He said little, but his features expressed ardent expectation. The queen and her son joined him and a circle of priests soon gathered around, but all spoke in timid whispers and their anxious glances betokened that ease and pleasant conviviality were alien to these guests.

"The banquet might begin," whispered Psenophis, "the tables are spread and everything is ready, but the king has not arrived."

"Patience," murmured Urmaa gloomily, "a man always comes early enough to his death."

Universal silence followed these words, the conspirators had almost achieved their purpose, but the shadows cast by the terrible deed impending rested heavily on their hearts; even the humblest of them felt the importance, the seriousness of the hour—to-morrow the earth would wear a different aspect, to-morrow the great news would thrill all Egypt, to-morrow a mighty sovereign would lie low, the scourge he had swung over

the nation would fall from his hands, to-morrow all the rock temples would resound with lamentations, already the royal tomb was opening its strong jaws and saying : "Enter, Rameses, thou art mine."

"The machinery for turning on the water is so arranged that a child can flood the hall," whispered Psenophis. "If we once get him here, I wouldn't give a date for his life. But I have a vague presentiment ! I don't know why ! The king's delay — if it only has no special meaning. True, I questioned the god and he assured me by visible signs that Rameses would come. Oh, ye gods, deceive us not ! If we have had a traitor among us, if the king has received a hint. . . ."

"Nonsense," interrupted Scha-em-Djam rudely, "the only traitor we had to fear is destroyed ; this is the day of his death ; while we are talking, the machine my vengeance devised is crushing him."

"So he is dead," asked Psenophis eagerly, "he is really dead ?"

"Of course ! How could he escape ?"

"I would give much for the certainty."

"You can depend upon it," said the prince with a scornful laugh, "he no longer breathes, he can do us no more harm."

"Did you see him lying dead before you ?" asked Psenophis.

"No !"

"No ?"

"No," answered the prince, "it was needless, nay impossible, for the box in which he is crushed cannot be

opened. Oh, it was an exquisite device of my architect, a perfect masterpiece of mechanism! Would you believe it; by pressing a spring in my sleeping-room, I could regulate the contraction of the metal plates?"

Psenophis paid the machine the tribute of his praise, but he evidently was displeased at having no tangible proofs of Menes' death; it made him anxious, though he said no more on the subject. The conspirators now tried to conceal their discomfort under the mask of forced mirth. Some laughed about the prince's machine, others jested with the male and female attendants, others went with the architect to inspect the water-works. Still there was no sign of the royal guest.

"I'm afraid Rameses has got news of our work," sighed Psenophis, "he ought to have been here long ago, he accepted my invitation so cordially, yet now fails to come."

They waited a long time in vain; the fear that the king had been informed of the plot forged against his life constantly increased; the conspirators' faces grew more and more anxious, some even hinted very plainly that they ought to fly without delay; but the queen eagerly opposed this suggestion. Flight would not save them, but would instantly arouse suspicion. Several messengers were sent to the palace and returned with the answer that the king had been suddenly taken ill, he had sprained his foot while riding, but in spite of the pain would grace the banquet with his presence; he would not break his word, but come if he had to be carried dying into the festal hall. This news had a very

soothing effect upon the waiting guests; their plan would succeed, only a little later than had been expected. At last a prolonged flourish of trumpets echoed through the darkness. The whole group uttered a sigh of relief. "The king! the king!" ran through the halls. The point was gained, he was there, the noose was already flung around his neck.

All rushed to the door to receive the sovereign who was so unsuspectingly entering his grave. Psenophis hastily gave a few directions to the architect, who promised to follow them exactly. The prince was the first to greet the Son of the Sun.

"What has detained my royal father," he said insinuatingly; "our kind host's guests have been awaiting you a long time."

Rameses left his litter in the full glare of the surrounding torches. All noticed his pallor, his fixed gaze, the haste of his movements, but they attributed everything to his illness. He glanced around the circle and then tried to smile — but the smile was strange and unnatural.

"Where *is* our kind host?" he asked with forced gentleness.

Psenophis, bowing humbly, approached. "Welcome among your servants, my royal master, and may the gods preserve you from harm," he said with an affected smirk. "I know you like subterranean halls, their coolness and silence will have a beneficial influence upon you; that is why I invited you to one of these apartments."

Rameses clasped his hand.

"Pardon my delay, a trifling accident that deserves no farther mention, detained me," he said with evident haste, "but now let us enter the banquet-hall, I am curious to see your new arrangements."

Psenophis, with visible impatience, urged his guests towards the subterranean chamber, it was plain that he did not mean to let his prey escape now that the victim was once in his clutches. The queen remained concealed at the back of the colonnade, from whence she cast sinister glances at her husband. "There goes the friend of the Jews," she muttered between her teeth. "I wonder if he'll find any fair Jewess in the realms of the blessed. Another love will soon embrace him—the deadly river."

Rameses took the high-priest's hand and the two men, apparently engaged in careless, nay friendly conversation, walked down to the subterranean hall. The king praised the arrangements for the entertainment, the brilliant illumination of the cool apartment, the fragrant flowers strewn upon the floor, and, with a peculiar smile, commended the richly-laden tables. The paintings on the walls seemed to please him.

"Fine pictures," he said gaily, when all were seated. "These paintings I see on the walls are beautiful—how long will they last?"

"How long, my royal guest? What a question!" replied Psenophis. "The pictures will last as long as the walls."

"Do you think so?" asked Rameses carelessly,

casting a piercing glance at Psenophis, which made the priest turn pale. "Well! to me this wall seems poorly built, you mixed the plaster too thin. But now let us turn to the wine."

The conspirators cast puzzled glances at each other, and the prince gazed suspiciously at his father, who with strange haste was swallowing a goblet of wine. Conversation flowed slowly, the guests talked in timid whispers, their laughter was forced, a mysterious embarrassment paralyzed their tongues. Psenophis muttered to the queen: "He suspects something," while the rest of the company played with their plates, scarcely tasted the dishes presented, and gazed timidly at their ruler.

"What are you whispering?" said Rameses to the queen, who had assumed an air of weary indifference.

"Nothing, my lord," replied the high-priest. "I said that you were fond of wine."

"Wine? Oh, yes, and I hate water," was the king's carelessly-uttered reply.

"I hope my royal master will find no more water in the wine than nature has mixed," Psenophis rejoined, with an attempt at wit, "by the gods, if it should prove otherwise, my old wine-bibber of a cup-bearer must be opened before your eyes, that we may determine how much he has lightened my skins."

The cup-bearer was called and protested his innocence.

"Let him live, Psenophis," Rameses interceded,

"he hasn't watered your wine. But tell me: which is more precious, wine or Nile-water?"

"You ask questions that are hard to answer, my king," replied the embarrassed man, "I think Nile-water is the most precious of all liquids to the Egyptians."

"Do you all agree to that?"

"Isn't your opinion the same — my guests?"

All assented.

"And yet," replied the king smiling, "if I had my choice, I should prefer being drowned in a cask of wine instead of the more precious Nile-water — or do you take the opposite view? You are silent? I see by your astonished faces that you prefer Nile-water. Well, well, I was merely speaking in general, but if I were ever under the unpleasant necessity of having you drowned, rest assured that I would do you the favor of casting you into your beloved Nile, then you could play with the fishes as long as you liked."

"You are in a strange mood, my royal father," the startled prince ventured to reply.

"Rise, my son!" exclaimed the Pharaoh suddenly, in a very grave voice.

Scha-em-Djam rose.

"Do you, too, rise, Psenophis — there! And now bow before me — lower — lower still. That's right! And mark this — I am yet king! You can take your seats again."

The guests had watched this strange performance with surprise, several of them fancied that Rameses had

drunk too much of the sweet wine before entering the banquet-hall or that his illness was of a more serious nature than had been supposed, and had passed into a violent attack of fever.

Fifteen minutes elapsed without any unusual incident. The Pharaoh seemed very animated, and his sparkling conversation fixed the attention of the whole company. As all noticed that he often glanced restlessly towards the door of the hall, the prince ventured to ask if he missed anything.

"I? yes," his father answered, "I am expecting some one." Psenophis was just giving the architect a sign to have everything in readiness, when a loud noise arose at the door of the hall. A slave, whose knees trembled as he moved, approached the high-priest and whispered something which made him fairly quake and instantly went the rounds of the whole assembly. The guests murmured together, universal alarm was expressed on every face, and all eyes were fixed anxiously upon the king. Some rose, others, turning pale, let the beakers drop from their hands.

"What is it that so disturbs this honorable company?" asked Rameses, glancing around the circle with a look of surprise.

"Will no one answer me? What has happened?"

No one ventured to speak. Rameses waited.

"Psenophis, I command you to speak."

"My royal master," faltered the prelate, "you seem to distrust us, my slave tells me that a body of your troops has surrounded my house. For what purpose?"

I must ask. May it please my sovereign to graciously send his soldiers out of the precincts of my peaceful home?"

"Does it surprise you?" asked Rameses with marked irony.

"What? My king?"

"That soldiers form my escort?"

"It is — I must confess — during a"

"Funeral feast, you meant to say," interrupted the king.

"Great sovereign"

"Well?"

"Banquet, I was going to say, it is not customary to have soldiers"

"Guard the monarch's life?" said the Pharaoh, finishing his sentence.

"Your life, my king? Is it not safe?"

"Just hear this crafty priest," cried Rameses laughing, but casting frowning glances around the assembly. "My life safe? Worthy servant of the gods, might I not get choked with a bone, or poisoned by the jealous glances of my loving wife? Who knows from what quarter danger threatens! My life is no safer than that of a mouse, no more secure than yours. To suppose an almost impossible case, might not this ceiling descend to kill me? Accident! You would say — wouldn't you? I demand an answer."

"My king — you are raving."

Deep silence followed, in which the laboring breath of the guests could be distinctly heard in the hall.

"Or, might not the Nile suddenly go mad," Rameses continued with increasing excitement, "and in this madness burst through the hall? Ha! ha! I can't help laughing. Why don't you join me? Accident, you say? What? Is it accident, Priest, or calculation? Answer."

"Accident, most glorious sovereign," gasped the prelate, trembling from head to foot.

"Then this, too, is probably accident" — and Rameses rose, hurled his full goblet with furious rage into the face of the terror-stricken Psenophis and, with a single bound, reached the door of the hall. During this scene a paralyzing torpor seemed to have seized upon the conspirators, they sat like mummies, no one ventured to stir or rise, most of them gazed at the king, who with heaving chest stood at the door, an image of noble indignation. They felt with terror that they were betrayed; each dreaded the future, the executioner's axe was hanging over their heads. To fill the measure of misfortune, the certainty that they were unmasked, a figure suddenly appeared beside the king, a face whose gentle eyes pierced Psenophis to the heart like a sword, at whose sorrowful features Prince Schem-Djam stared as if he beheld a ghost. In truth, had the god Osiris appeared before the guests in all the pomp of his majesty, their amazement could not have been greater, their repentance more profound than at the sight of this youthful figure. The prince groaned aloud as he saw him, the queen closed her eyes, for Menes, whom they had believed dead, was stand-

ing beside the king, who grasped his preserver's hand.

"Ay, it is he," thundered the king to the petrified group, "he, whom you sought to destroy in the most barbarously inhuman way; the gods delivered him, that he might save me from your accursed watery grave."

Rameses then briefly explained that Menes' prison, when about to crush him, had burst asunder, the floor of the cage, instead of resisting, had yielded to the pressure and the youth owed his life to the imperfect construction of the machine. The iron walls, more compassionate than men, had allowed their prey to escape and Menes fell into a rock chasm from which he sought his master as quickly as possible, arriving in time to inform him of the death awaiting him. — Rameses was just entering the litter when his friend arrived, panting for breath. This was the cause of the Pharaoh's delay. When Rameses had finished this explanation, his features wore a graver expression and for a moment he gazed pityingly at the trembling listeners, then, controlling himself, he cried: "No! No mercy, I must be cruel!" Menes tried to intercede for the traitors, who sat rigid as corpses, but the mighty monarch looked sternly at him, or at least strove to conceal his relenting mood.

"I know what I must do, Menes!" he interrupted, "your kind heart does no honor to your reason, it is out of place here. Human beings like these deserve life far less than the brutes; my omnipotent father, Râ,

would be wroth with me if I allowed his sacred rays to fall upon these sinners, if I suffered their accursed feet to longer sully the earth."

"But your son, oh, my king!" Menes ventured to interpose.

A look of infinite pain passed over the sovereign's stern features, and he bit his lips.

"I have neither wife nor son," he said in a hollow tone.

Then the strong man broke down, and was obliged to lean on his friend's shoulder for support.

"Listen, unworthy subjects," he continued in a tremulous voice, while the criminals now gave unequivocal signs of terror, "listen! Your lives are ended, make your peace with your gods, you will never leave this hall."

A long wail of agony interrupted the angry monarch's voice. Menes left the doorway, unable to endure the sight, for the most terrible expressions of mortal anguish greeted his eyes.

"Mercy! Mercy!" moaned the unfortunate wretches, sinking from their chairs.

"This poor tortured youth, Menes, against whom you have sinned unpardonably, generously besought me to spare your life, my son," cried the king, "but your sin too far exceeds all human limits, I cannot pardon you, perhaps the gods may. Farewell, my son! Farewell, my wife! Farewell all! I do what human and divine justice alike decree."

Rameses hastily left the door of the hall, which was

now closed by his soldiers, as the desperate wretches, with heartrending shrieks, rushed towards it to force their way out. Some fell fainting to the floor, others gashed their own limbs with knives.

The dull roar that speedily followed announced that the waves of the Nile canal were surging into the room; the earth quaked under their crushing weight. Horror seized the soldiers charged with this wholesale execution as the wails of the drowning rose from the earth, gradually grew fainter, and at last wholly died away. The moon shone sadly down upon the house, now transformed into a gigantic tomb.

CHAPTER XVI.

BAFFLED.

SEVERAL days had passed. The king's features still looked as if fate had stamped upon them an expression of perpetual woe; he wandered idly through his palace all day long and at night his attendants heard him moaning bitterly. The morning after the terrible event a staff was found that the monarch had actually gnawed through in the intensity of his anguish, so little power had he at first to control his feelings. Menes had recovered from the horrors of his incarceration and tried to help his master bear his burden of grief, an attempt in which he so far succeeded that the king

gradually received his courtiers again and, to divert his thoughts, plunged with persevering industry into affairs of state.

A new, though far less harrowing sorrow to the sovereign, lay in the fact that Rebecca had been much less talkative during the last few days and the physician attributed her silence to some secret sickness. One evening, while the Pharaoh was with her, she suddenly turned pale, grew faint, and required powerful remedies to restore her consciousness. The king had become warmly attached to the Jewess, she had occupied his wife's place and he trembled for her life, though hitherto it had probably been one of little repute. He was not ignorant that she felt a sincere affection for him, and returned her love, though not in the measure it was offered; never for an instant did the sovereign forget the wide distance that separated them.

One morning Rameses entered Menes' room with a somewhat brighter face. The young Egyptian was just writing a letter to his mother.

"I have come from my daughter," said the Pharaoh, seating himself.

The words aroused a vague sense of discomfort in Menes' mind, though he could not understand its cause.

"I have been talking with her," Rameses continued.

"I hope she is better," replied Menes, averting his face.

The king nodded.

"She is calmer," he murmured. Then, as if roused from a dream, he bent hastily towards his young preserver, gazed tenderly into his eyes and said in a gentle, almost caressing tone: "Do you know the name of her disease?"

"I am no physician, my royal master," replied Menes, panting for breath as if a heavy weight oppressed him. "My knowledge of medicine is very slight."

Rameses smilingly shook his finger at him.

"Rogue! You are evading me," he said.

Menes stooped over the table and pretended to be looking for a roll, but it did not escape the king's notice that blush after blush crimsoned his face.

"The name of her disease is: Love!" Rameses continued, "she will not die of it, I hope, but I should like to cure her so far as lies in my power."

The confusion that overpowered Menes is almost indescribable, he began to tremble violently and his eyes expressed a depth of anguish he had scarcely felt under the iron roof of his dungeon. The dagger the king's words contained pierced his heart more and more deeply, he already awaited the approaching conflict. What should he do to prevent the impending confession?

"I have been talking with Asa-Termutis," the king continued, not suspecting what tortures he was inflicting on Menes, "the poor girl, amid bitter tears, confessed her secret to me. She threw herself on my breast and seemed inconsolable, then rose to the height

of happiness only to sink to the depths of despair again. She is glowing with ardor, wasting away — do you hear, Menes? — she loves; she has confessed her secret.”

The young man kept his face steadily averted.

“Well!” the king went on, “since you intend to remain silent, I will speak. She loves *you*! *You* are the object of her affection — she has told me so.”

The words were uttered, Menes felt he was standing on the verge of an abyss.

“You are modest, my son, I know,” Rameses continued. “You did not dream that so lofty a fortune would shine upon your path, so you now stand mute and helpless. Give me your hand, my noble friend, how could I better thank you for having twice saved my life than by giving you for a wife one who already loves you? Do not tremble, turn pale, and look so disheartened — I know what I am saying. The step I am taking is doubtless unprecedented, nothing of the kind has ever been witnessed since the Nile rolled through these meadows and the pyramids pierced the sky, but I will make it possible; extraordinary services merit extraordinary rewards. I know, too, that my people will approve this deed, no murmur will be raised at the strange wedding, they love their king and revere his preserver far too deeply to make any objection to this recompense. Take my child, she is yours.”

Rameses was going to embrace the youth, but drew back in surprise as he met his sad, tearful eyes. While

hearing these words from the king's lips, Menes felt as though drops of hot lead were being poured into his heart. In his ecstasy of suffering he but half comprehended their meaning. Could he refuse this great favor, this extraordinary kindness, without mortally offending the monarch? Could he accept it without being forever miserable and making the beautiful girl he loved wretched also? What ought he to do? How could he act? He reflected a moment. "Accept!" cried the evil demon in his mind. "Power! Splendor! Fame! All are yours!" But he remained steadfast.

"It is all over, I am lost," he cried, beating his head against the wall in his overwhelming agony, "I must lose my royal master's favor. Oh, why need it have gone so far? Why did the gods destine me to wound this generous man, this noble-hearted girl, why did not your son's cruelty destroy me? Farewell. Let me leave you, I will go into the desert; banish me from your presence, or — still better — kill me."

The astonished sovereign shook his head as he listened to this outburst of grief.

"I don't understand you," he then said quietly, "calm yourself and speak more plainly. Why am I to banish you? Why must you lose my favor?"

"Because" — Menes hesitated, but a glance at the Pharaoh's benign face gave him courage to continue. "Because I cannot wed your daughter, my royal master. Reproach me! Call me ungrateful, kill me — but you cannot shake my resolve."

"And why, your king asks, do you refuse this great favor?"

"I might lie, I might evade you," replied Menes, "but it is beneath my dignity to make pretenses!"

And he frankly told him that he loved Myrrah, that he must remain faithful to her, and that it was his firm determination to marry her and no other. Then he fell at the Pharaoh's feet, prepared to be repulsed by him, prepared to take his curse instead of his favor into the desert to which he already saw himself exiled. For a long time he lay prostrate on the floor with his brow pressed upon the tiles, shedding burning tears and vainly waiting for the king's reply. When he at last raised his head Rameses had disappeared. "He has gone, departed in wrath," thought Menes. "He would not even waste another word upon you, his servants will bring you his angry commands." The young man spent the whole day in his room, expecting every moment to be dismissed from the palace. He was incapable of doing anything and could only shed silent tears, for he felt that he was losing a firm friend in the king. He sat thus till the last rays of the setting sun poured their crimson light upon the gold and ivory ornaments of his table. His glance wandered over the bright hues of the room which had become so dear to him; he fancied the figures on the walls must surely hang their heads in grief because he was never to see them more, but no, they smiled down upon him without sympathy, holding their lotus-flowers and their harps as if nothing had happened. How could he

help loving Myrrah and feeling nothing but friendship for the princess? His yearning to see the pale-faced little Jewess grew more and more ardent; he would fain have risen and darted to Memphis in a breath, just as he was. "I must go to her!" he exclaimed aloud. His heart swelled with blissful pain under the ardent impulse of his love, his imagination conjured up her image. Just then he heard footsteps outside his door. It opened; he started from his dreams and beheld the king. Now it is coming, now I am lost, now the man whom I adore almost as a superior being, will deal me my death-blow. Is his glance threatening? Menes gazed beseechingly at the sovereign. Rameses' eyes were wet with tears, as bending towards the youth, he whispered in a hollow, tremulous voice: "Let it never be mentioned again!" and the two men, weeping aloud, sank into each others arms.

Never again did the noble-minded ruler utter a syllable in allusion to this painful subject. Menes saw by his grave manner how deeply he sympathized with his daughter, but the royal favor to himself was not clouded a moment. On perceiving this, the youth showed his benefactor redoubled devotion; the tenderness the two friends displayed to each other was really touching; Rameses found his son thrice restored in the young noble, and even intimated to him several times that he honored the fidelity he displayed to the object of his love.

Offerings of tribute had arrived from various parts of the countries conquered by Rameses, and on the following day, towards evening, the king inspected the different articles. The cages of wild beasts had been placed in the garden and Rameses, accompanied by his friend, walked past them, taking special delight in the Ethiopian monkeys, whose humanlike grimaces extorted many a smile. He had not enjoyed this diversion long, when a servant begged him and Menes to follow him to Rebecca's apartments, the Jewess was ill. Rebecca had been confined to her room for some days; the doctor had at first attributed her illness to a cold, but the sickness now appeared to be more serious. The king instantly quitted the garden, and Menes accompanied him to Rebecca's chamber. When they entered she was lying with closed eyes upon her couch; the physician sat by her side, watching her intently. Rameses in a low tone questioned him about the course of the disease. The doctor was just answering when Rebecca opened her eyes, smiled, and feebly extending her hand to her royal lover, said: "I thank you for coming. You see me for the last time."

"Is her mind wandering?" the startled king asked the physician, who was arranging the pillows for the pale, hollow-eyed invalid.

"Unfortunately, I believe she speaks the truth, my royal master," he answered thoughtfully.

"The truth?" said the king faintly. "Must she, too, be torn from me?"

Rameses did not love the beautiful Jewess. Her

vivacity and bewitching gayety had amused him, but she had failed to inspire him with deeper, more lasting feelings. When he now saw her lying so ill and perceived that she was to be taken from him, his grief extended to suffering in general and he thought mournfully of the perishableness of earthly beauty, the frailty of the human race.

"We are not yet at the gates of death," he said to the sick girl, smiling, "we shall still spend many a happy hour together."

Rebecca shook her head sorrowfully.

"I have been poisoned," she murmured, "I suspected it would happen."

Rameses turned in surprise to the physician, who confirmed the Jewess' words. "The dead queen must have succeeded in mixing a slow poison with the luckless girl's food. The doses had at first scarcely affected the dancer, but by degrees her health became impaired, and now the vital organs had been so completely impregnated by the venom that nothing could be done."

"So they even drag perfectly innocent people into the tomb?" cried the king when he had heard the statement.

"Not innocent ones," replied the Jewess, "I was guilty."

"You? Guilty?"

Rebecca told the Pharaoh the whole story of her temptation and acknowledged her death to be a just punishment. Rameses was deeply agitated by this confession, faltered amid tears and frequent attacks of

convulsions, but he was generous enough not to reproach the dying girl. Menes remembered that he had heard the conspirators speak of Rebecca's co-operation and sympathy; but at the time he had not understood their allusions and afterwards had not considered them worth investigating. He now told the king this, thereby confirming the statements of the dying Jewess.

"We will not speak of it, Rebecca," said the Pharaoh kindly, "you are not guilty, it was the dead traitors' fault, not yours. They took advantage of your weakness. Besides, you have atoned for your sin by revealing the conspirators' rendezvous to Menes. Think no more of the matter."

"And you forgive me, my royal master?" sobbed the girl, throwing herself on the king's breast.

"I forgive you, you have given me many a happy hour," said Rameses compassionately. "You are very near my heart."

The sufferer, with a smile of happiness on her face, sank back among her pillows. The physician sprang forward, offering her a medicine of very pungent odor, which soon revived her.

"I must make two more confessions," she gasped with evident effort, "their concealment would oppress my soul."

"Speak fearlessly," said the king gently, taking her hand.

Rebecca then owned that she and her brother had robbed the treasure-house and urged Rameses to send an officer at once to Memphis to call Isaac to account,

adding: "He deserves to be punished, he is a wicked man."

The king immediately gave the order. This seemed to soothe the dying girl, who impressively urged the messenger to use the utmost dispatch. "Justice is sufficiently satisfied," she whispered faintly. "Now I have a word to say to Menes."

The young man approached her couch, he pitied the pallid sufferer, though he had never respected her, and her present condition expiated her past sins. She opened her lips and vainly gasped for breath. Probably feeling that, in her weak condition, she would be unable to utter this last confession, her efforts to force out the words threw her into the greatest agitation. All tried to aid her. They saw that she became vexed with herself and, summoning all her strength, murmured the one word: "Myrrah," which of course did not fail to cause Menes intense expectation.

"What do you want to tell me about her?" he asked, reading in the dying girl's distorted features that she felt impelled to make important, perhaps momentous disclosures.

"Myrrah," murmured the Jewess, who was evidently growing weaker, "you had scarcely gone—Isaac—you are betrayed—by. . . ." here the dying girl's bosom heaved convulsively, and she gazed at the youth with a look that strove to tell all, a despairing glance that seemed to ask: "Don't you guess it? Don't be so stupid, help me."

"Betrayed?" faltered Menes. "By whom? Do

not leave me in doubt, do not torture me, I see that you are telling no lie; on the brink of the tomb we speak the truth."

The Jewess shook her head. The pallor of death overspread her cheeks, Menes felt her hand grow heavy and cold in his, her fingers relaxed their clasp.

"Speak! Betrayed by whom?" he shrieked into her ears as he saw the dying girl's strength fail, "oh, Eternal Gods, be merciful, give her lips power to utter what she wants to tell me, an anxious foreboding assails my heart. . . ."

The king motioned to the desperate man, for it was too late. A look of infinite compassion flashed from Rebecca's eyes upon the young noble. Tears rolled down her cheeks, the bystanders saw how deeply she grieved for him, how sincerely she mourned her helplessness. Then her smile grew more and more fixed, stony, and expressionless; her eyes glazed, her lips turned livid—one shudder! and the dancer's adventurous career was ended. The king, deeply moved, had left Rebecca's couch, but Menes still stood gazing at the rigid face, on which no smile would ever rest again, which would never more charm any lover. It seemed as if those dead lips must yet reveal what they had tried to utter. "What did she want to tell me? Betrayed, she said. Betrayed! When I had scarcely quitted Memphis. She connected that Isaac, too, with Myrrah. What can have happened at home?"

The dying girl's broken hints allowed his excited imagination to have no rest, it conjured from the mist

of uncertainty visions of torture, tormented itself to guess the secret, drew the boldest inferences, on which he scarcely dared to reflect, and which only rose timidly on the most distant horizon of his mind to speedily give place to others. He could no longer endure this state of uncertainty and begged the king to grant him leave of absence, nothing but an immediate journey to Memphis could relieve him from this martyrdom. Rameses consented to his departure, and a few days after the youth went to the harbor of Thebes, where a royal vessel, under orders to convey him to Memphis without delay, awaited him. Absorbed in thought and unheeding the bustle around him, he descended the broad stone steps which disappeared beneath the waters of the Nile. His eye wandered indifferently over the hundreds of masts which towered into the air before him, the bales of merchandise borne on the shoulders of sturdy porters. His glance sought only his own ship, which he had now reached and to which he would gladly have given wings. He was just stepping on the plank, when he unintentionally jostled a vender who carried half a dozen little bird cages on his head. The tiny songsters screamed, the man swore, and Menes, to quiet him, was about to offer him a trifling gift. He had already stretched out his hand to do so, when his eye fell upon the ship next his own. He involuntarily stopped, gazed across with dilating eyes, and then in the utmost excitement hurried through the densest part of the throng to the other vessel. "For whom is he looking there?" thought the servant who attended him, not

knowing what to make of his master's sudden flight. Menes had seen a woman step on the shore, at sight of whom he fancied he must be dreaming. Was it really she, and for what purpose had she come hither? He dealt violent shoves, upset a box of geese, trampled into the dust several pots that stood in his way, and after many adventures reached the vessel. Unluckily, the figure which had so suddenly arrested his attention was no longer visible. His servant approached.

"Follow me quickly," Menes called to him. "We must find her. Hurry after me."

"What is it you are seeking so eagerly?" asked the servant.

"Didn't you see the lady in the blue dress?" cried Menes. "The one who held her head so proudly? Three slaves were carrying the umbrella over her."

The servant thought he had seen such a person and followed his master, who hurried swiftly forward, both men casting searching glances in every direction. They had passed through several streets, when Menes uttered an exclamation of joy. A lady of haughty bearing was walking towards the palace.

"It is she," he cried, "it is my mother."

A few steps more, and he had reached her. The meeting was sincerely affectionate on both sides. Menes, deeply moved, kissed Asso's hand and the latter gazed proudly at the son who had risen so high in his sovereign's favor. The news of his elevation had reached her in distant Memphis. How often at entertainments she had boasted of his fame.

"You gladden your mother's heart," she said, "but permit me to accost you more deferentially than I formerly did, my distinguished son."

Her manner was very humble, she often bowed respectfully to Menes, presented him to her attendants as a great man in the kingdom and seemed to take a certain pleasure in emphasizing her own lowliness; it was evident that she was revelling in the rays of his renown, which caused the modest youth no little embarrassment. Tidings had also reached Asso that he was to marry the Pharaoh's daughter, but when she questioned him about it, the young man angrily turned the conversation. He wanted above all else to have news of Myrrah, and made numerous allusions to her, which Asso at first intentionally pretended not to hear, but, when he plainly enquired about her, his mother's face assumed a sorrowful expression.

"Let us find some quiet place where we shall not be interrupted," she said, "and I will tell you about the girl, curb your curiosity until then."

Menes' heart throbbed wildly as he accompanied her to the palace. This timid reticence about Myrrah's life, taken in connection with the dying Rebecca's mysterious words, aroused his anxiety; from the moment he mentioned the loved name his mother had become very taciturn. He hastily led the way to his room, where he ordered refreshments to be served. Of course there was no lack of admiring exclamations from Asso about the magnificence of the royal palace; the good lady almost lost her composure when she entered

her son's superbly-furnished chamber. She carefully examined the rugs, the gold, and the ivory, asked the value of the embroideries, and knew the name of every material.

"And you live in such luxury, you lucky fellow?" she exclaimed, kissing him, but with a reverence that made the youth smile.

"Certainly," said Menes carelessly. He was thinking only of the news of Myrrah; what mattered this hollow splendor, he would gladly have resigned it all for one word from the girl he loved. When Asso had become accustomed to the magnificence glittering around her she soon, woman-like, felt as much at home in it as if she had been born under the canopy of a throne.

"But now tell me at last about Myrrah," said Menes, drumming impatiently upon a costly dish; Asso took it carefully out of his hands and placed it beyond the reach of his fingers; it would be a pity to injure the valuable article, she thought, and the king would be angry if it should be broken.

"Myrrah," Asso began, commencing to do justice to the repast now brought in, "oh, my dear son, what am I to tell you about her? Let me say nothing of this unpleasant subject. You see I am wearied by my journey, we will speak of the matter to-morrow."

"You can imagine how anxious I am to hear from her," said Menes, "for my curiosity has been roused to the utmost by all sorts of rumors that have reached me."

"The desire to give you news of her brought me here," replied Asso gravely, "it is a proof of my affectionate zeal; but I am still too much agitated to be able to speak of her with calmness. Spare me to-day, my son."

Menes, in spite of every effort, could learn nothing more of the young girl and was obliged to show his mother to a room near his own, which Rameses had voluntarily placed at Asso's disposal as soon as he heard of her arrival. The widow, in response to his urgent entreaties, only gave him a few hints which roused his curiosity to the utmost without satisfying it.

When on the following day Menes intimated that he had received from the dying Rebecca a hint of Myrrah's career, Asso nodded sorrowfully, tenderly stroked his cheeks, and called him her dear son. At the end of a few days she sometimes dropped dark hints about fidelity in general, talked diffusely of the fickleness of certain women, and took every means of filling her son's heart with fear, by representing that she could not yet tell him, without being cruel, what he must finally learn, and wished to defer the deed as long as possible because it was so hard for a loving mother to wound her own son.

As may be supposed, on perceiving this, Menes foresaw only too clearly what sorrowful news she desired to conceal. He became silent and gloomy, completely lost his frank, trustful nature, nay he was so greatly altered that the king himself often watched him with anxious eyes. At last he could control himself no

longer. One day, when he returned from a walk, which instead of diverting his mind had only darkened it still more, he went to his mother and bluntly declared that, if she did not instantly tell him exactly what had happened to Myrrah during his absence, he would set sail for Memphis at once. Thus driven into a corner, Asso, striving to give her features a compassionate expression, finally told her story. She began by hesitatingly saying that she had cared for Myrrah as she promised, but the girl had only grieved for her lover a very short time after his departure. The impression he had made upon her was soon effaced, and she had gone about the house singing as merrily as though Menes had never existed. She then reported Isaac's suit for her hand and the short delay with which the frivolous Jewess had accepted him. She, Asso, had often asked Myrrah to write to Menes, but the girl had always refused, nay she must own the faithless creature had laughed at her lover's letters. "He was a very good fellow," she had once said, "but she couldn't help loving Isaac better."

Menes gazed steadily into his mother's eyes as she repeated this cleverly-devised story, accompanying it with the necessary pantomime. Then he turned pale, closed his eyes, bit his lips till they bled, and went away without saying a word in reply. "Did he believe the tale or not?" the ambitious, crafty woman asked herself. He had remained so quiet, she would have preferred to see him burst into a frenzy of rage. Had she perchance made her colors too strong and thereby ren-

dered her picture unlikelike? Or was the invention already taking effect, did he hate the girl he had once loved? She must try to discover this in order to construct her plans for the future. "If I am giving him pain," she said to excuse herself, "it is done for the purpose of promoting his welfare."

Asso did not see her son again all day. Towards evening she received a note which informed her in almost cheerful or at least very calm words, that he had determined to go to Memphis the next day to avenge himself on his faithless love, if matters proved to be as Asso had told him. This resolve was of course very annoying to his mother, since it must speedily reveal the utter falsity of her tale, and she instantly hurried to Menes to dissuade him from his intention. He scarcely listened to her, but with forced composure gave orders to have the ship made ready. When she assailed him with reasons which should have shaken his determination; instead of opposing her arguments he asked how she liked the apartment the king's favor had bestowed upon her. Asso stared at him in bewilderment, shook her head, and turned to go. At the door she paused again.

"Are you firmly resolved to convince yourself of Myrrah's faithlessness?" she asked.

Menes, with a smile on his white lips, glanced out of the window and nodded; his strange manner made her feel that he no longer trusted her.

"Then I advise you to kill the Jewess," she replied. "Don't listen to the excuses women like her always

have in readiness, but kill her without hearing her tale, her assurances might change your resolve, for you are easily moved."

"Rely upon it, I will strike the guilty one," said Menes with a faint smile of doubtful meaning.

Asso winced.

"I will tell you the best course to pursue in this affair, my son," she replied in a caressing voice. "You are weak and soft-hearted, you know. Let *me* punish the guilty one, my wrath will not be softened by her tears; I am offended in you and, when women hate, they hate far more strongly than men. I hate her — oh! if you knew how deeply."

He was silent.

"The work of vengeance shall be mine, shall it not?" she continued. "You consent?"

"You will stay *here*, mother," the youth answered resolutely.

"What! Do you say that so firmly, almost imperiously?" faltered the widow.

"Certainly."

"I shall go, my son."

"You will not! I shall prevent it."

"Oh! then I am a prisoner?"

"Almost, partly — until I return."

"It seems to me you don't credit Myrrah's faithlessness?" said the trembling woman.

"Why shouldn't I, since it is *you* who inform me of it?" replied the youth, a smile on his blanched face as he gazed keenly at his mother with flashing eyes. "Is

not everything possible in this world? Even the purest, most sparkling dewdrop becomes sullied, if hurled upon the ground, even the brightest gold is tarnished, if unclean fingers handle it. Oh! of course it might be possible. Who can understand the inmost depths of another's soul! I may have deceived myself, for at that time I was completely bewitched and had no knowledge of human nature. At any rate, it is time for me to obtain absolute certainty."

"Then you believe I have told the truth?" cried Asso.

"I believe nothing, I wish to see for myself," Menes answered quietly.

Asso departed in great bewilderment. She had not yet heard of Myrrah's flight from Isaac's house since, at the time the escape was made, she was on her way to Thebes, so in imagination she now beheld herself standing unmasked before Menes. What should she do? Anticipate him? Have Myrrah killed or, better still, steal away from Thebes and perform the bloody deed herself? This plan seemed to her the wisest and, in her blind zeal to remove the obstacle from her son's path to fame, she did not shrink from it for a moment. Myrrah must disappear from the earth, then her own detection would be impossible and Menes' marriage with the princess easily accomplished. Her resolution was fixed, and she would execute it with the same decision as she had formed it. That very night a boat, which must outsail Menes', should bear her to Memphis. Ere leaving the palace she requested an interview with Asa-

Termutis. She found the princess, who had now attained a mood of noble resignation, seated on her couch, which she sought very early in the evening. The royal maiden said very little and merely shook her head in sorrowful disbelief, when Asso intimated that she would use the utmost efforts to unite her to her son. Only once, when Asso asked if she would not speak to Menes herself, and thus perhaps exert an influence over his heart, she replied: "He has answered!"

The widow went to her room, where she instantly packed the most necessary articles of clothing and prepared for her secret departure. On the table she found a letter from Memphis. Her friend, the nomarch of that city, had addressed a few lines to her. Asso had scarcely glanced at the hieroglyphics when her waiting-women saw her turn pale; she drove them all out of the room and read once more, with the most strained attention, the words which destroyed her whole plan.

"My noble friend," the letter began, "many strange things have happened in Memphis during the few days of your absence. I think it my duty to briefly inform you of them, since much that has occurred might perhaps be of importance to you. To begin with the less striking event: Myrrah has run away from her husband, and nobody knows where she has gone. Some say she has been sold as a slave to Ethiopia, others speak of her death in the Nile, and others, again, declare that she was seen on a ship sailing swiftly towards Thebes. Yesterday royal officials arrived in our city and arrested Isaac. Without plunging into disagreeable details, I

can tell you of what he is accused. He is said to have robbed the king's treasure-house, a crime whose punishment is death. When arrested the prisoner's malice led to the discovery of an extremely important document, of which, however, I can only disclose that it contained strange revelations about Myrrah's origin. This document — people whisper to each other — the thief found in the treasure-house, carefully preserved it, and was just in the act of destroying it when it was snatched from him in the nick of time. The paper will shortly be in the king's hands; its disclosures are eagerly awaited. I have just learned that Isaac escaped the arm of justice by plunging into the Nile from the ship to which he was carried to be conveyed to Thebes. When they succeeded in getting him out of the water, he was a corpse."

Asso, panting for breath, tore the letter to pieces as soon as she had finished it. Her whole plan was destroyed. If Myrrah had fled — where should she go except to Thebes; perhaps she was already near her. When had she arrived? She might meet Menes at any moment. This must be prevented. The terrible surprise of this escape gave her no time to think of Isaac's death and the discovery of the document; this one idea swallowed all the rest. What should she do now? Her journey to Memphis had become unnecessary, but Menes, too, would no longer find what he sought; that was one consolation. To discover where Myrrah was and make her vanish unperceived from the face of the earth was the widow's sole remaining purpose, her only

prospect of deliverance. Spies should be sent throughout the country, no expense should be spared, she said to herself, the runaway Jewess must be discovered, though years were consumed in the search. And as Myrrah had undoubtedly turned her steps towards Thebes, must she not be found in the vicinity of this city? Now, the only point was to prevent her victim from anticipating her, keep her from meeting Menes. There lay the difficulty; this meeting must be hindered at any cost. Absorbed in such plans and thoughts, the excited woman hurried through the dark pleasure-grounds surrounding the palace, passing all the little decorations and architectural ornaments which had been placed there, the grottoes, statues, rocks and bushes, without giving them even a single glance. She was first roused from her feverish visions by almost running against the little obelisk as she hastened on.

"Be calm," she said to herself. "This agitation can merely do harm, it is robbing me of the power of calm reflection. Everything will be as I wish, if I only have patience."

Then, completely exhausted, she sank down on a bench, and wiped the perspiration from her brow.

"I am playing a dangerous game," she murmured, "but I have courage to accomplish it, I will stake all, even my honor, to win, and if I am defeated will submit with dignity. I know what is best for my son and, without regard to him or others, will pitilessly strive to raise him in the world, to see him great and famous, even though the curse of the gods should rest upon me,

and these hands" — she looked at them — "be forced to shed blood. I will shrink from no crime, when the point in question is his success."

Asso's love for her son was ambition. She did not feel the baseness of her plans and purposes, her ideas of human happiness were totally unlike his. Before her lay the lake that discharged its waters into the Nile-canal. It flashed with a silvery light, like the back of a shield flung on the turf. On the shore, the feather-like foliage of a palm-tree swayed against the blue vault of the night heavens, studded with golden stars. The moonbeams flickered upon the surface of the lake, and a boat, against which the waves broke with a low, lapping sound, rocked gently to and fro. The rippling of the waves often echoed amid the silence of the night like a mournful cry for help, and when the rustling of the branches blended with the monotonous murmur of the water, one might have fancied that two human beings were telling each other their woes. Beyond the lake the black roofs of the sleeping city gradually melted into the blue of the sky; two obelisks towered aloft like giant arms stretched yearningly upward. A strange emotion took possession of the widow amid this solitude, into which, under the sway of her excited feelings, she had ventured. She did not like solitude, nay, she feared it, and was in the act of rising to return to the palace as fast as possible, when she saw a white object moving behind a dark hedge. Was it an animal lurking there? A heron? Asso sat still, her heart throbbed audibly. The branches creaked. The gravel

grated as if a crocodile were dragging its body over it. The bushes now parted and a slender figure glided out, timidly scanned the path which lay white as snow in the moonlight, glanced around in every direction, and then moved slowly forward. A human being had been concealed there, Asso could only distinguish that the person was a woman, nothing more could yet be ascertained. The figure glided nearer, apparently going to the palace. Asso sat like a statue, the stranger would be obliged to pass her bench. The figure paused, drew the folds of a cloak closer, and then approached. Who was it? A joyful suspicion began to dawn upon the widow. She had seen those slender limbs before. The timid creature had reached the bench; she started when she saw Asso's motionless form, but probably at first supposed her to be a statue, for she was passing on. But when within two paces of the widow she shrank back as if she had been bitten by a serpent. Asso started up, her eyes blazing with joyful amazement. She had found what she sought.

"Do I recognize you? You here?" she said through her clenched teeth, her features distorted by a hideous blending of rage, malicious joy, and deep malignity. One clutch, and the stranger's hand was seized as if in a vulture's claws.

"Let me go," murmured the white figure, in whom Asso had recognized Myrrah.

Yes! It was she, before her stood her foe, the girl she hated, accident, good-fortune had delivered her into her hands. Now she might breathe freely, the

fulfilment of her ardent desires was close at hand. Myrrah, too, had recognized the terrible woman who had been the source of all her suffering, she gazed into the cold, heartless eyes, heard her panting breath, and could scarcely overcome the icy chill that darted from her brain through every limb at the sight.

"Why, this happens admirably, my sweet Myrrah," said Asso, smiling spitefully, "I am glad to be able to renew your acquaintance in this way. Come, let us have a little chat together, sit down. Some one wrote me that you had run away; that wasn't right, Isaac loved you sincerely."

How came Myrrah there? The story of her adventures may be briefly told as follows:

After concealing herself among the rushes on the shore of the Nile, she soon found a boat whose owner was willing to take her to Thebes, and some gold trinkets and other valuables she gave him increased the man's zeal. When the voyage was half over she was joined by her faithful slave, Hadsa; but the boatman now declared that two people were too many for his skiff. Nothing would induce him to go on, but he placed the two women on a ship which had brought a cargo of ivory from Ethiopia to Memphis and was now going to Thebes on its return home. The captain declared his willingness to carry Myrrah and her servant to the city, but they had scarcely gone on board when he became very officious in his attentions. They requested him to put them on shore, but the Ethiopian, instead of yielding to their entreaties, locked them into

a lower cabin. From certain hints and allusions they now guessed that he had formed the atrocious plan of selling them as slaves in Meroë. Their escape was due to a singular incident. The captain's brother wanted both women, to which the other would not agree, and violent disputes frequently arose between them. When the ship had reached the vicinity of Thebes, the older brother entered the cabin and, seating himself beside Myrrah, insolently attempted to jest with her. Myrrah, pale with terror, did not notice that he had forgotten to lock the door, but Hadsa's keen eyes instantly discovered the neglect. Myrrah remained silent, but Hadsa uttered a loud shriek, sprang to the door, and called the other brother, who instantly rushed in and, perceiving what had occurred, at once attacked the offender. Both combatants struck and bit each other like wild beasts and at last rolled upon the floor. Hadsa took advantage of the opportunity and grasping the hand of her trembling mistress led her out of the cabin, up the ship's stairs, to the deck, from which they easily made their escape, as the plank connecting the vessel with the shore had not been drawn in. They then fled to Thebes, where they had arrived several weeks before. During this time Myrrah had had no other occupation than to reach Menes' presence, but had never succeeded. That day Hadsa had advised her to hide among the shrubbery in the royal gardens, while she herself went to the palace, and asked for Menes, to tell him who was waiting. Myrrah had done so, but unable to stay longer in her leafy retreat, she had at-

tempted to go to the palace too; Hadsa had lingered too long, and the thought of being near her lover and yet so separated from him, had become unendurable. And now! She had escaped every peril, Jehovah had guided her to the gate of happiness, she had evaded Isaac's power,—yet the gulf of ruin yawned before her. What malicious chance had led her into the arms of her bitterest foe, into the hands of the woman to whom she owed all her misery? All was useless. Was she to suffer shipwreck in the very harbor? No! Now she *must* conquer, she *must* summon her last strength, help was so near, Hadsa might rush into the park with Menes at any moment, she was safe, she had no further danger to fear.

"I escaped," she answered bravely, "the hour of which I once warned you has now arrived, the hour when your treachery will be revealed to your son's eyes. Now he will learn what a mother he trusted. Look to yourself, and see how you are to evade his wrath."

"Are you so certain that he will ever learn what I have done?" sneered Asso, casting a strange, sullen glance around. "The gods gave the hated Jewess into my hands. You are near him, it is true, but beware — there's many a slip between cup and lip."

"What do you mean?" replied Myrrah quietly, "my voice will reach the chambers of yonder palace; leave me, you can no longer prevent our union."

"Not prevent it?" murmured Asso in a sullen, absorbed tone. "In giving you Isaac for a husband I

did more than duty required, I ought then to have done the deed on which I have now resolved. Ye gods, I thank ye for permitting me to sweep away the cloud that prevents the beams of fame from gilding my son's head, he has reached the mark, the barrier that separated him from the crown is breaking. Come, Myrrah, you must bid the world farewell. Show your love for Menes by permitting yourself to be killed, that the way to the stars may be open to him."

Myrrah, gasping for breath, gazed anxiously into the cruel face of her foe.

"When the grave has closed over you," Asso murmured dreamily, "my son will have strength to clasp the princess' hand. His mind is still wavering, but if you fall he will rise; the gods desire your death, I see them smile approvingly upon me — would they else have led you to my arms?"

"Let me go unharmed," gasped the terrified Myrrah, trying to wrest her hand from the widow's hold.

"No," cried the proud woman, "you shall not escape me."

"I will scream," panted Myrrah, "I will call for help."

She saw Asso draw a glittering object from beneath her robe.

"Do you mean to kill me? With your own hand?" cried the girl. "Oh! why doesn't he hear me. Menes! Come to my aid. Quick, ere it is too late! They are killing the girl you love. Must I die

ere having seen him, while so near, die under his very eyes?"

Exerting all her strength, a sudden push released her from her enemy's grasp, but she had scarcely retreated a single step when Asso, with the bound of a tiger, sprang directly in front of her, and Myrrah saw the blade of a dagger glitter in the moonlight as its point was turned against her bosom, covered only by thin folds of cloth. She already felt the cold metal touch her warm skin and, hastily seizing the widow's hand, forced the weapon back. But, exhausted by travel and excitement, the girl could not cope with Asso, and she sank on her knees, the pressure of the armed hand grew stronger and stronger, Myrrah's resistance became fainter, she saw the dagger's point approach and closed her eyes, submitting to her sad fate without farther defence, nay without even a cry of pain.

"He shall never have you," Asso murmured in her ear.

Suddenly the widow paused in the midst of the stroke. Myrrah opened her eyes again; a rustling noise was heard in the bushes, they parted and Myrrah screamed loudly, for she recognized Hadsa, who was closely followed by a figure at sight of whom the blood rushed from her brain to her heart and then flowed back again. Asso stood as though turned to stone.

"It is he," murmured the girl in a hollow tone, and ere she could rise, she saw a man's hand snatch the dagger from the frantic Asso, felt an arm raise her,

glowing lips pressed upon her own, and heard a voice choked with emotion, tenderly call her by name. In the ecstasy of her delight she stretched out both arms and clung to the dark figure bending over her as a drowning man clings to a rock ; her whole being urged her to seek refuge on that breast, she knew not who it was, did not ask, did not think, she had but one emotion, a sense of such overwhelming rapture that her heart almost stopped beating. At last, though she could find no words, sighs and tears came to her relief.

“ Found ! ” she whispered.

“ Mine forever,” she heard murmured by the lips pressed to her own. Asso had watched the recognition between the two lovers like a hyena robbed of its prey. Her iron features betrayed neither shame nor fear, their expression was one of scorn. Menes placed the girl, who had scarcely recovered from her excess of joy, in Hadsa's arms and she burst into convulsive sobs upon the slave-woman's breast. Then he quietly approached his mother and gazed at her with a look of unutterable sorrow ; by degrees, however, perceiving that his grief made no impression upon her, but on the contrary she scanned him defiantly, his features assumed a calm, cold expression.

“ Mother,” he said in a hollow tone, which betrayed the intense effort to conceal his anguish beneath the mask of indifference, “ mother, what have you done ? ”

Asso remained silent and gazed proudly into her son's face, but her fingers twitched convulsively.

"What have you done?" cried Menes again. "I have learned all — oh, how I have been deceived in you! Oh!" he sighed, "I said: 'mother,' you no longer deserve that name. No! You no longer deserve it."

A look of anxious foreboding flashed into the depths of Asso's eyes.

"No," continued Menes, now giving free course to his grief, "you no longer deserve that name, and I cannot express the agony I feel in being forced to say so. I hoped that you would be a faithful counsellor, I hoped for your real love — but that is over. You have no son and, woe is me, I have no mother. But it is far better to be motherless than to have a parent who deceives her son. And how deceives him! Oh, ye gods! Had you inflicted on me all the misery you have caused this poor, hapless, helpless girl, I would have forgiven you, would have conquered my resentment, but to thus torture in my absence the tender heart which you knew was bound to me by all the ties of affection — it is too much, only an inhuman nature could commit the deed, I cannot pardon you! In her you have doubly, trebly tortured me, offended me, insulted me so deeply that, had not the gods made you the author of my life — I — yes, the words shall be spoken — I would not shrink from plunging this dagger into your wicked, unmotherly heart."

Frantic with grief, he hurled the weapon so violently at her feet that it dashed the gravel up in showers. The widow, deeply stricken by her son's words,

clenched her hand upon the folds of her robe; a sinister expression darkened her features, her lips quivered, and she seemed to be trying to shake off the impression made by his language. Then she turned slowly, a disagreeable smile hovering around her lips.

"Oh, a good son!" she gasped, "who would fain kill his mother. Do so! What deters you? Pierce the breast that nursed you, the heart that loves you, ay loves you, spite of all I have done."

"Loves me?" cried Menes, unable to control himself longer. "Can you never — even at this moment — cease to deceive?"

"And do you not ask why I have done this?" said Asso, her lips scarcely moving as she spoke. "You blame me? You do nothing more than blame? Do you not consider that I may perhaps also merit praise?"

"Praise?"

"Yes, praise!" replied Asso, her harsh voice beginning to tremble. "I was cruel, I deemed it my duty to be so. It was right to do what I did, it was done because I loved you. Ay, shake your head — loved — and" — her tone now became so defiant that Menes shrank — "and I would pursue the same course again, if I had the opportunity, and circumstances demanded it. You are ungrateful," she cried as Menes tried to interrupt her, "a son who does not understand his mother, a son who is unworthy of his mother, a contemptible son, whose base mind cannot soar above his pitiful purposes, petty aims. Well! Marry this miserable

Jewess, end your days in obscurity, cherish her, care for her, kiss her, pursue the childish, nonsensical game called love, which you share with the brutes and the lowest fisherman; rear your children, have no loftier purpose than to hold a grandchild on your knee or buy your wife a new kerchief for her head. Fie upon you. But take the scorn, the utter contempt of your mother who destined you for higher things, you weakling, above whose head a royal crown once glittered and who refused it."

Asso had poured forth these words very passionately, her voice rising as she spoke, but scarcely had the last one died away when she turned abruptly and walked on. Menes saw, by her firm, resolute bearing, that she was thoroughly convinced of her own uprightness and praiseworthy conduct, and forbore to make any further representations which must have been futile. For a moment after her departure he stood lost in thought, gazing sorrowfully after her retreating figure.

"She never loved me," he said to himself. "Her affection was rooted solely in egotism. I renounce this mother and it will now be easy for me to disown her, I hope I shall never see her again, that her sullen brow will never more cast a shadow on my radiant happiness."

His face beamed with joy as he approached Myrah, who released herself from Hadsa's arms, dried her tears, hurried towards him in sweet confusion and, clasped in his loving arms, sank upon his breast.

Hadsa laughed gleefully as she gazed at the lovers,

a tear glittered on the velvety blackness of her cheek as she slipped quietly away, that she might not disturb the raptures of the happy pair.

“So I hold you at last in my arms,” murmured Menes, “how much grief and suffering you have been compelled to endure ere you could seek refuge on my breast. Oh, what trials the gods have imposed upon you, my poor hunted gazelle, my chaste lotus-blossom, that hides its head so shyly under the waves. Oh, had I only had a suspicion of—I will not utter her name—of her wiles, if I had received one hint of your tortures; but I was far away, believed you at peace, and now learn that you have endured far more than I, you loyal, resolute soul. I am enraged with myself that I did not feel how you were suffering for my sake, that I could smile when you perhaps were weeping, eat while you were bearing hunger, slept sweetly, while you were tossing on a couch wet with your tears.”

“It is over now,” murmured Myrrah, pressing her lips to his, “let us say no more about it.”

“You are right,” he whispered, drawing her closer to his heart, “past grief exists no longer. We shall now be doubly happy in recalling the time of trial, it will only serve to shed a halo round our present joy; as yonder moon shines from the dark vault of the sky, our love will beam from the gloomy background of perils escaped.”

“I have *you*,” said Myrrah, closing her eyes, “and I need nothing more, shall ask nothing more, I have forgotten the world.”

He felt her bosom throbbing softly against his own and his lips refused to question her about the dangers she had encountered or to tell her of his own. The story must be deferred until some future day. He perceived how sure she felt of safety on his breast, for she trembled as she clung to him, and he vowed henceforth to keep all sorrow from her pathway, to make her life as bright as possible, never to utter an angry word. His eyes lingered rapturously on the charms he was permitted to embrace, then wandered to those of nature, which seemed enhanced by his ecstasy of love. A roseate glow, the reflection of dawn, was rising above the pinnacles of the palace. The monarch of the day was sending his fiery satellites, the sunbeams, through the darkness to gild the columns of his son's abode. The palace stood like a gigantic marble ship amid the green waves of the foliage in the park, intoxicating perfumes were wafted to the lovers, and a waking bird greeted them with its first song. The moon looked gently down as it bade them farewell. How the lake rippled under the cool morning breeze, how the palace glowed, how softly the stars closed their eyes, how the branches whispered! A strange emotion thrilled the lovers, they wished to smile, but could not help weeping, their eyes glowed with a deeper light, and their kisses became more ardent. But lo, who emerged from yonder leaf-shaded walk, attended by a brilliant train? Who motioned to the trumpeters to sound their bugles? It was King Rameses, the Son of the Sun: his father's rays shone tri-

umphantly around him. Approaching the enraptured Menes he gave him a papyrus-roll; Menes looked first at Myrrah, then at the king, he saw the monarch embrace the girl and formally present her to the whole court as his daughter. "Yes! Daughter!" he said, "such was the will of my illustrious father, Seti I., so he wrote in this document wrested from me by a traitor's hand; Myrrah, this document states, was my exalted father's child — now, she is mine!"

The great men of the kingdom bowed before her, while trumpets, drums, and harps joined in the hymn of love, that love which gives mortals happiness and rules the world, and all moved towards the temple, whose pillared interior opened majestically before them.

Far away up the glittering Nile a gilded barge swept on towards Memphis. A beautiful girlish figure leaned over the side, her eyes resting longingly on Rameses' palace, her ears listening to the trumpets echoing from its walls.

"How happy art thou, oh Princess!" sang her attendant slaves, dancing around her, "thou canst fly from city to city, the daughters of Egypt pay thee homage, the palms and pyramids bow before thee, thy foot will soon tread the sacred Oasis of Amon, where, thou canst henceforth live in thy dreams! How happy art thou, oh, Princess! Thy ornaments are of gold

and precious stones, Isis the wonderful praises thee, fair slaves serve thee, the youths of thy nation bend in love before thee. Ay, in love. And thy tomb is richly painted, deep, and silent. Ay, happy art thou!"

But a tear fell from the princess' eyes into the rushing waves of the Nile as, with a yearning gesture, she stretched her arms towards Thebes.

THE END.



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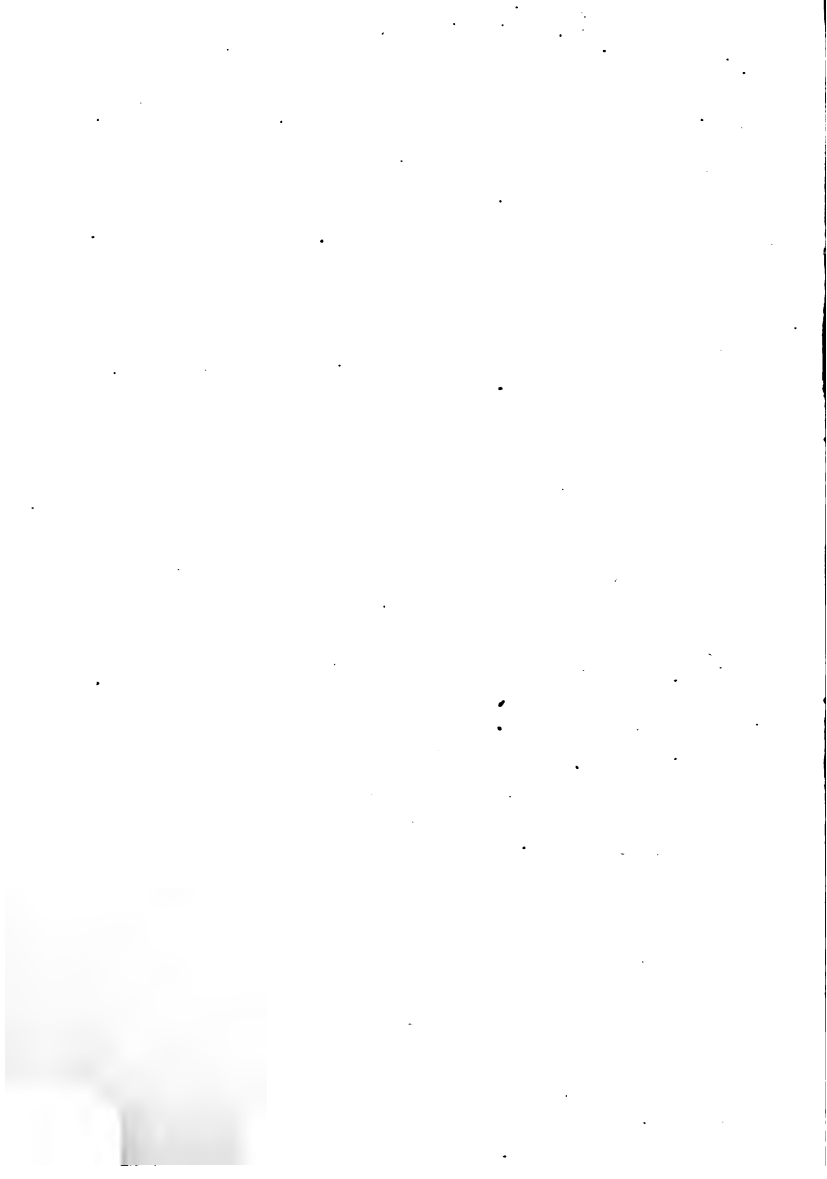
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